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# POETRY IN WARTIME

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*an anthology*  
*edited by M. J. Tambimuttu*

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## PREFATORY NOTE

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With a few exceptions, all the poems included in this volume were written after 3rd September, 1939. I have allotted more space to those young poets who have either appeared in magazines for the first time, or whose work, since that date, has seemed to me to merit attention; in this sense I suppose they may be called our 'war poets', and this anthology is chiefly meant as an introduction to their work. I am not, however, responsible for the strain of sadness running throughout.

I wish to thank my wife, J. C. Hall, and Patricia Ledward for expressing their opinions on untested work.

The majority of the poems have been selected from *Poetry* (London). Thanks and acknowledgements for the others are due to the editors of *The Adelphi*, *The Dublin Review*, *Horizon*, *Kingdom Come*, *Life and Letters Today*, *The Listener*, *St. Martin's Review*, *New Statesman and Nation*, *Folios of New Writing*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry* (Chicago), *Purpose*, *Selected Writing*, *Seven*, *The Spectator*, *Twentieth Century Verse*, *Wales*; and to Messrs. George Allen & Unwin for poems by Alun Lewis from *Raiders Passed*; to Messrs. Jonathan Cape for the poem by C. Day Lewis from *Poems in Wartime*; to Messrs. Chatto & Windus for the poems by Mervyn Peake from *Shapes and Sounds*; to Messrs. J. M. Dent & Sons for the poem by Richard Church from *The Solitary Man*; to Messrs. Faber & Faber for poems by William Empson from *The Gathering Storm*, by Louis MacNeice from *Plant a Phantom*, by Michael Roberts from *Orion Marches*,

Stephen Spender from *Ruins and Visions*, by Henry Treece from *Invitation and Warning*, and by Vernon Watkins from *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd*; to the Fortune Press for poems by Francis Scarfe and Nicholas Moore; to the Hogarth Press for two poems by Terence Tiller; to Messrs. Martin Secker & Warburg for the poem by W. R. Rodgers from *Awake, and Other Poems*; and to *Poetry* (London) for poems by Anne Ridler and G. S. Fraser from their pamphlet collections, *A Dream Observed* and *The Fatal Landscape*.

M. J. T.

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## KENNETH ALLOTT

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### *Ode in Wartime*

O antique vistas of stone sarcophagi,  
Silent except for the stammer of literature  
    Through millennia,  
Whose yellowing relics caricature and festoon the  
Dropped anonymous features of this ice-era;  
All plasm shaped to human symmetry  
Through shell-coiled generations of incessant down-  
    pour;

Assemble backward out of charred time's collapse.

    Come,  
    Honeycomb each coxcomb  
With drums for the dead and sea-green elegiacs,  
Ring now like finitus in every ear.  
Hands, be immersed in suffering like a surgeon,  
    And eyes, probe everywhere.

O agnus mundi, baa-lamb inhabiting  
The inhibiting volcanic ranges of today,  
Hovered over by harpies, restricted to cavities  
And fissures out of the metre of time's way,  
Labyrinthine limp hero of a thousand epics,  
Miles from the mild archipelagos of content,  
Let these who underline your rhythms and stresses  
Warn you like sirens of impending judgement;

    Sailor at sea  
With their mercy of coracles and compasses,  
Learn with the flashing miracle at last discernment.  
Let their lives warp you away from the thinly-roofed  
    crevasses.

You need not go astray, as they did, in the mountain  
    passes.

Yet what heartbreak we have managed to mint  
    between

The abstract cold that eyes us and the iron fire,  
In our cage-bubble of doom barely six miles high,  
Our quaking littoral with its sastrugi of pressure  
    Where nothing is shipshape, and time  
    Flares like a vesta and finds

An odour of memory like a pink keepsake.  
Spreadeagled fall from your precipice of pride  
    Crying 'Peccavi',

Who futile and supine rut in the folded hills,  
Wishing disasters may happen somewhere else.  
    The shadows are eerie,  
    The eyelids heavy,

The chances of flowers go out like a life on the tide.

May they find featherbeds in no man's land  
And humdrum bedfellows to their faults blind  
    Who die these days.

They shall not have seen the body of justice blaze  
    With its five stars of wounds,  
    Or fed from brimming cornucopias.

They join the mythical beasts in the heart's asylum  
Beyond the sky-high flurry of the galaxies,  
    And there is peace.

I light a candle  
For all whom time has whittled, sons of suffering  
Who found no thread to lead to the middle of meaning,  
Famished outside a ring of luxuries.

It is not too late though the clocks of Europe cull  
    Their separate times,

And blood and lies skew nations like teetotums,  
It is not too late for the resilience of existence.  
Forgiveness may still look out of the slits of eyes,

And the wind hallow the standing stones and the cities.  
    Be like the thoroughbred  
    To take this gate  
And come at last to fertile Avalon,  
Where real the perfect summer sleep of heaven  
And real the headlong motions of delight.  
O ragged people on the human promontories,  
You shall be led through howling vortices  
    By a star home,  
And the doors shall open, and fires be in all the rooms,  
    O my refugees.

Simple from dustbowl of despair  
To hail Dorados of desire,  
The golden-spired absurd metropolis  
Shimmering in its sea-frame of glass,  
The oh's and ah's of love, the oranges;  
Simple to uncross stars and muffle wrong  
    Like Lenten statues.  
O mayfly, flighty, immoderate, your mood  
Dances like Blondin on a single wire  
    Of extravagant blood.  
'I am happy,' he cries. 'Suckled where vast streams  
    rise,  
    And born to straighten hills.'  
But the shires are eaten with shadow and the whites of  
    eyes  
See the long echoes explode as ironies.  
    The sad dew falls,  
Brightness dissolves in the air.  
    The night is numinous  
    And the power whispers:  
'Oh, all your days are lustreless  
    And time unfair.'

Yet we who walk among the distorting mirrors  
Whose hearts refuse even the empirical years,  
Must undermine our eye-grasp of defeat

And prove facts liars.

Hope must be evergreen, and will distil

Tinctures of promise from a retort of tears.

Let the birds teach us who sing on parole, and sing  
Among the unmapped clouds and the sun's splinters,  
Or the children buoyant as corks in a sea of cares,

Whose behaviour says

'Phosphor shall rise above a moon of sorrow

And we shall know such a day as never was.

Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow

Do what you will and when, love whom you please.'

---

## W. H. AUDEN

---

*September 1, 1941*

I sit in one of the dives  
On Fifty-Second Street  
Uncertain and afraid  
As the clever hopes expire  
Of a low dishonest decade:  
Waves of anger and fear  
Circulate over the bright  
And darkened lands of the earth,  
Obsessing our private lives;  
The unmentionable odour of death  
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can  
Unearth the whole offence

From Luther until now  
That culture mad,  
Find what occurred at Linz,  
What huge imago made  
A psychopathic god:  
O and the public know  
What all schoolchildren learn,  
Those to whom evil is done  
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides knew  
All that a speech can say  
About Democracy,  
And what dictators do,  
The elderly rubbish they talk  
To an apathetic grave;  
Analysed all in his book,  
The enlightenment driven away,  
The habit-forming pain,  
Mismanagement and grief:  
We must suffer them all again.

Into this neutral air  
Where blind skyscrapers use  
Their full height to proclaim  
The strength of Collective Man,  
Each language pours its vain  
Competitive excuse:  
But who can live for long  
In an Euphoric dream;  
Out of the mirror they stare,  
Imperialism's face  
And the international wrong.

Faces along the bar  
Cling to their average day:

The lights must never go out,  
The music must always play,  
All the conventions conspire  
To make this fort assume  
The furniture of home;  
Lest we should see where we are,  
Lost in a haunted wood,  
Children afraid of the night  
Who have never been happy or good.

The windiest militant trash  
Important Persons shout  
Is not so crude as our wish:  
What mad Nijinsky wrote  
About Diaghilev  
Is true of the normal heart;  
For the error bred in the bone  
Of each woman and each man  
Craves what it cannot have,  
Not universal love  
But to be loved alone.

From the conservative dark  
Into the ethical life  
The dense commuters come,  
Repeating their morning vow;  
'I *will* be true to the wife,  
I'll concentrate more on my work,'  
And helpless governors wake  
To resume their compulsory game:  
Who can release them now,  
Who can reach the deaf,  
Who can speak for the dumb?

All I have is a voice  
To undo the folded lie,

The romantic lie in the brain  
Of the sensual man-in-the-street  
And in the lie of Authority  
Whose buildings grope the sky:  
There is no such thing as the State  
And no one exists alone:  
Hunger allows no choice  
To the citizen or the police;  
We must love one another or die.

Defenceless under the night  
Our world in stupor lies;  
Yet, dotted everywhere,  
Irony points of light  
Flash out wherever the Just  
Exchange their messages:  
May I, composed like them  
Of Eros and of dust,  
Beleaguered by the same,  
Negation and despair,  
Show an affirming flame.

---

## GEORGE BARKER

---

### *Six Sonnets from America*

TO MY MOTHER

Most near, most dear, most loved and most far,  
Under the window where I often found her  
Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,  
Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand,



Irresistible as Rabelais, but most tender for  
The lame dogs and hurt birds that surround her,—  
She is a procession no one can follow after  
But be like a little dog following a brass band.

She will not glance up at the bomber, or condescend  
To drop her gin and scuttle to a cellar,  
But lean on the mahogany table like a mountain  
Whom only faith can move, and so I send  
O all my faith and all my love to tell her  
That she will move from mourning into morning.

#### TO MY BROTHER

And you, my shy one with a pin in your eye  
Where I affixed the agony-badge, my brother,  
You as gentle as water and simple as oxygen,  
Shunning the compromise and the clever shadows,  
Now, like a singing sheep dragged out to die,  
O sing, sing up out of the fiery abattoir:  
And only to hear your voice, your voice again  
I'll come down to join you in the sorrows.

No, let not this one, O let not this one  
Clutching the tooth of Hitler in his chest  
See the red spittle of my own blood ooze  
Between his fingers: for this one is one  
Whom wombs cannot restore, or time redress,  
Nor I or the whole world recover if we lose.

#### TO DAVID GILL

Or, you, new father of a blonde daughter, born  
Between a gutted Warsaw and an Oslo sold,  
With your knee-riding son, and nose for weather,  
Subscriber to liberal papers and the Sailors' Fund,

The monument of the tremendous normal,  
O where are you now, not wandering on the wold  
Between Godalming and the sea-blossoming heather,  
Or spitting half-crowns in the goldfish pond:

But mad as a mechanic with a broken spanner  
Stand pointing an empty rifle at the East;  
Or like the Spring embedded in November  
Lie hoping for resurrection in Stavanger  
Under the stone and snow. Or now you rest,  
With oh so many ordinary things to remember.

## TO T. S. ELIOT

Expecting a bomb or angel through the roof,  
Cold as a saint in Canterbury Cathedral,  
This gentleman with Adam on his mind  
Sits writing verses on cats that speak: lives  
By the prolonged accident of divine proof,  
A living martyr to the biological.  
Hell spreads its horrors on his window blind  
And fills his room with interrogatives:

St. Thomas doubting and not doubting,  
Confident of God, but dubious of human,  
I render my tongue as merely minor flame  
To glorify this inglorious martyrdom:  
And when the bomb or angel breaks the vaulting  
Trust he remembers, among the others, my name.

## TO STEPHEN SPENDER

This poet with his soul upon his shoulder  
Trudging up a world's steps to bring to those  
Who shiver by the embers of their optimism  
The hundredweight of his pity, now to him

I wave a word as the times grow colder  
And our tears freeze to giant stars and close  
The eye of love with death's bleeding prism.  
Will war make blind vision wrong could not dim?

Let me see now not the irregular fountain  
Whence poems rose like crystals, glittering truth,  
But the tall chap with a leg like a flying buttress,  
A hand for a saw or bow, a face worth a fortune  
But for the distorted torture of the mouth  
Which to his words of truth bore such a witness.

TO C. B.

When the mask, when the mask, my darling, my  
darling,  
Rots on your cheek bone and the imperial pimpernel  
Rewards your memorial with insignificant insignia,  
And against your head the world like a ball is bursted  
Where the bullet abused it, then, then the dandy  
Life out of your feathered hand hopped and fell  
Still as a dropped doll forgotten in the syringa,  
My dear, my darling, this, this is not the worst:

The worst is love that whips me with your smiles  
Nine-tailed with tears that cut me to the quick,  
And against all my thoughts turning a saw of pain  
Strips my glory to the bone. Let whatever will  
Ransack my scarecrow of its great intrinsics  
If only, oh my darling, you inhabit me again.

---

AUDREY BEECHAM

---

*Norway*

Once the sound of its drum has burst the eardrums  
And the loud shriek anguished at last to silence  
Love of itself is vanquished ;  
But the relinquished  
Hold of the lover sleeping binds the mind  
To levels lower and to those more stale  
Than pools of stagnant rain beneath the earth.

Spain, our ace, was tricked by molten gold:  
And our sly trail unrolled on Europe's map  
Slugged action, flounders now through snow  
To race the waiting bomb-burst of our hearts.  
The rhythmical stop-go  
Of fate's two eyes suffice to hold us back  
From any courage which would jeopardize  
The bonds that hold our honour to a rack.

O England, may your blight of boredom melt  
Like sweat of love, and may your wind ride up  
Above the doldrums of a boring war  
To blast the flags that flap in national shame  
Out of the sky  
And cheer the hands that fail  
And fall from masts.

*Song*

There's no more talk and ease  
No more time to do as you please  
Pressure of men on roads, of boots and heels,  
Lorries and guns, and birds again  
This winter will freeze.

War comes flooding like a tide  
O where shall we run, shall hide?

Setting out or turning back,  
The old wound split in new strife,  
A new wound is a new eye  
A festering wound a womb of different life.

Where shall we hide but in the wound?

### *To the Desert*

Will you vanish in the marshes  
From my path driven beyond the mirror  
Past the soft grass and the Spanish treasure;  
And will your breast rest my velvet head  
When I resist the last verse of the sirens' song  
And march into an acrid land, sun-starched  
And furrowed with the lines of my hand?

Only alone can pass from shadow to darkness  
And exorcize from the past those presences  
Who press their gifts upon the looking-glass,  
Upon my image flattered and aghast.

The road in the desert is long and lonely, through  
boulders  
Shaped in buttock and breast, suggesting comfort  
And smoothness, that once I asked for a shoulder to  
rest

My head against . . . I'll know how the bones of the  
earth

Crumbled to sand, the great stones pounded to earth  
(By man smoothed flat, made great again in roads)  
Forever ground, flow on in powdered shoals.

---

BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN

---

*Dead Ponies*

There is death enough in Europe without these  
dead horses on the mountain.  
(They are the underlining, the emphasis of death).  
It is not wonderful that when they live  
their eyes are shadowed under mats of hair.  
Despair and famine do not gripe so hard  
when the bound earth and sky are kept remote  
behind clogged hairs.

The snows engulfed them, pressed their withered  
haunches flat,  
filled up their nostrils, burdened the cage of their ribs.

The snow retreated. Their bodies stink to heaven,  
potently crying out to raven, hawk, and dog,  
Come pick us clean, cleanse our fine bones of blood.

They were never lovely save as foals  
before their necks grew long, uncrested;  
but the wildness of the mountain was in their  
stepping,  
the pride of Spring burnt in their haunches;  
they were tawny as the rushes of the marsh.

The prey-birds have had their fill and preen their  
feathers:  
soft entrails have gone to make the hawk arrogant.

## *Christmas Eve by the Baltic*

I think Africa must be like this desert  
Where we wade  
Knee-deep through the sand of the downs.  
Water is smooth as oil  
In the depths of the bay.  
Grey sea is united with the clouds of the sky;  
She has no horizon.

Here, in the primeval swamp  
Of alder-shoots and birches,  
In water smelling of rottenness,  
In prehistoric sadness of things placidly rotting,  
Stands the elk.  
Heavier than the hart;  
Thrusting without pride his palmated horns  
Massive as shovels,  
Among the alder shoots,  
He broods in an eternal twilight;  
Last offspring of hairy trolls in the legends of my  
people.

Fox and badger slip in a nightmare of lust  
After hares in whose frog-bulging eyes  
Is the whiteness of terror.  
No sportsmen come here to shoot them  
So they watch with innocent eyes  
The miraculous man  
Motionless in sad water.

See, behind the virgin forest  
Bright sand is shining;  
The transparent shore of resin whence

Old Babylon and Assur took  
Amber to adorn their women,  
In the days before the Lord tore from them  
Their linen and sounding ornaments.

Before God raged:

‘Come down and sit in the dust,  
O virgin daughter of Babylon,  
Sit on the ground:  
There is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans:  
For thou shalt no more be called  
Tender and delicate.  
Take the millstones, and grind meal:  
Uncover thy locks,  
Make bare the leg,  
Uncover the thigh,  
Pass over the rivers.

And thou said'st, I shall be a lady for ever.’

The green waves of the Baltic  
Roll against the shore;  
Damp sound of churchbell rises  
From the heart of greenness.

### *Dead Climber*

Sheep and goats are blessed that die there  
Above the valley bottom.  
So now must he be blessed who lies  
Broken upon the scree.

*The spite of night's rage tosses not his hair;  
The vacancy of his eye-socket is mounded with snow.*



Rock sucked up sweat from the moist hands ;  
Gullies took whiteness from the scratch of his boots ;  
His breath made a feeble heat in clefts as he fought  
For handhold and foothold ; his breast beat on the stone.

The man's heart sang to his going up,  
As slowly, with insinuating toe,  
He rose against the storm,  
Thinking in the pride of body  
To unveil the sun and move a cloud  
From the peak of his delight.

*Then the spite of day's rage tossed his hair ;  
The brightness of his eye gleamed in the shadowy places.*

The mind of him held images of water,  
Vertical, dropping in thunder :  
Lake water sullen under a dead sky.  
All waters, sweet and salt  
Washed through his brain ;  
The Atlantic swell engulfing pale beaches of sand—  
(eternal rising and sucking backward of tides)—  
Black waters of the dead lake  
Shunned of fish and bird,  
Where the only haggard cliffs look down upon  
          themselves  
Lost in the bottomless well.

*The spite of day's rage plucked at his hair ;  
The brightness of his eye gleamed in the shadowy places.  
The people of the plain are become shells emptied of delight.  
They are broken on wheels of despair  
Turning through the endless night of the valley. . . .*

Chaste fear, a curlew's shadow across the bog,  
Took him when his foot slipped on the rock,  
And he fell.

He had cast out desire upon the mountain ;  
And the rock cast him from her without passion,  
Spinning a winding-sheet upon a pinnacle.  
We may be drowned in tears and yet the skull  
Hideously grins behind the travelling blood.  
So now he is a broken thing on stones,  
The mouth laughs mirthlessly.  
His blood is congealed upon the scree ;  
He is frost-bound to his love beneath the ice.  
The blood in him sang once—he was a proper man.

*The spite of night's rage tosses not his hair ;  
The vacancy of his eye-socket is mounded with snow.*

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## RICHARD CHURCH

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### *Something Private*

Waking this morning to a glory  
Of birds and slant light in the orchard,  
A mad diffusion of honeysuckle  
On the air, and fields dew-hoary ;  
I rubbed my eyes with a sleepy knuckle,  
Stung them to watchfulness nurtured  
On delight in the day. I put behind  
The sirens of night, the terror  
Of bombs, and children consumed with fire ;  
Deeds of pride and evil mind,  
Of mothers' sons warped in the mirror  
Of a madman's doctrine and desire.

Though knowing my post in the burning city,  
My duty to neighbours in the street,  
The need for teamwork rather than pity,  
All heroics subdued and discreet,  
And discipline so necessary and dull;  
Still along my nerves I heard the feet  
Of dancing life, and in my brain the pull  
Of daydawn ideas, things to be done  
Intimately, creation in private  
Joy, engendered by the sun,  
Then cast for all mankind to have it.

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## STEPHEN COATES

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### *Poem*

The emptiness is wide where the sea  
Washes against no rock, the wind makes no moan  
Among crossed branches or the idle grass.

For this is the channel where no dark ships pass  
With a bump against the weather, no hold  
Is there against the pressure, no stopping the flow.

And no use gathered from the current, here grow  
No bright fishes among dark passages or birds  
Rest on the bank on long red legs. The tide

Is sluggish and vapid along the floor, the wide  
Waves are empty and the spray returns untouched  
—And untouchable where there is no foothold.

. . . . .

On the populous shore birds cry, the cold  
Glaucous gull catches fingers round small rabbits,  
The ashes are left between round stones.

The sand is tracked and crossed, the tide-mark has  
bones  
Of the drowned cat and oil-caught petrel, sponges,  
And the strange stick that held bananas, brown bottles.

The star-grass cuts and the wire-worm throttles  
The new roots. Violets are rare and the sand  
Moves down the bank where the silver holly clings.

But here no wind jerks, no hot cry springs  
Out of a valley where the mouse is running, only wide  
Is the emptiness where the sea washes itself,

Where the colour is slow, where no shelf  
Holds an egg, only the hollow hand of the sky  
Stares down without purpose on the wasted waters.

### *I Hold Your Face in my Hands*

I hold your face in my hands like a precious bubble  
With my wrists close together under your chin  
And the tips of my fingers on the tips of your eyes  
And your face comes off in my delicate grasp.

I carry this precious bubble in the box of my hands  
Like the metal moon couched in its wet tissue paper  
And bring it away with me, not sent in advance,  
So that here I may unpack it to remain with me.

How to protect this precious bubble when my  
guarding hands

Are busy twittering among the tea-cups and cigarette  
talk

Troubles the centres of my palms and worries  
The bend of my wrists under your chin.

But because I have held in my hands this precious  
bubble

So that between my hands still lingers a round memory  
The pin and rough touch of this further wandering  
Can do no harm, cannot break this steel-bound  
framework.

### *We Never can have Enough . . .*

We never can have enough of what is given  
For the moment will not hold, there is no place or  
manner

Of keeping the sky in the place where the cloud-gap is  
a sword

And even the stars are moving to less satisfactory  
positions.

There is the moment when the window is opened and  
orange air,  
Crinkled softly with the blackbird's song, water-still,  
Saunters quietly round the new leaves and dead  
branches;

When the finger-eyes clutch and piano-ears grapple.

And the search would be long if the cold did not push  
back

Or fear of the time draw away from the green-streaked  
and

Water-colour sky; this night's bombers sounding small  
and silly

And no longer ominous against a new backcloth.

But the heart creaks and plans ahead, planning  
For fairer futures, not daring to accept the present,  
When the shout is too loud and wishes drowned  
In too many seas and conditioning responses.

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## ALEXANDER COMFORT

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### *Stylites*

Sleep and I will watch for you, I, no other;  
night with the wind's wing in it, singular feathers  
blow over hills, roofs cool, the small tidemarks  
of dust fall quietly; sleep, city—  
for you have seen the leaves fall, feather by feather  
and the tree stand bare; the gains and promises vanish,  
the flesh blow from the bones, the stones uprising,  
sleep trusting the night, for the night is friendly  
and darkness laps the stairs behind all couples.

Sleep and I will watch for you, I, no other.  
Drink the dark river, sleep with your wife, your sorrow,  
sleep with the pale girl, pick the sorrowful fruit  
that in summer hung high and highly desired—is tasteless  
now that the wolf comes and the river rises,  
now that the towers come down and the signs and the  
curtain.

O sleep and I will watch for you, I, no other,  
clasp my knee on the housetop. Sleep city  
and the lamps will all be taken away, and you not know  
it.

Only the river is moving, keeping her keys, remembers  
cityless banks and the barren rush and the pebble  
the sun spangling sand, over cold formations  
of fishes swinging her various ceiling.  
But now the city stands—and I: and the river  
the chaste, the merciful, treading stones by night  
to shrive, white novice telling beads  
under all bridges, husbandless, votary.  
Clasp and sleep under the day's long shadow, pale girl,  
soldier.

You who lay in fields, rode Saturday lanes  
to find hot hay to play in, you who danced  
to randan trumpets, you who kissed  
your spring security out under trees,  
loved lighted tramways, always hoped for fortune;  
Summer ran in your streets, small red lips  
by night, Death was obscure and happily curtailed.  
But she who kisses you still cannot cover him, cover  
him  
now nor break your tunic with her kisses.

And you who were cold and quiet like cut flowers,  
you obscure seeds hoping out winter, you who ran  
in the dust of the streets, shouting your infallible  
answers: you who were patient—  
you who knew the worst, the blood on the petal,  
the bud's struggle, the sound of screwing-down:  
you will be quiet, all of you—  
quiet in rows, for this city is dropping its cones,  
life is dropping its cones and they roll, and we are  
among them.

And now by night the river  
winds its unmarried mist among our industry,  
smooth under the lampless quiet, blowing

through no man's land, shroud for the pitiful armies,  
white cloth on the face of the world. O river,  
Mary of sorrows, Ursuline, mourner, Magdalen,  
dressing by night the body for burial  
spare us no spices, sweeten us, on our eyelids  
laying your cold compassionate pennies.

Not as a bride, because there are no more weddings,  
there isn't the time, and the funeral's coming:  
and life is the trade of the four black stallions,  
lips are hot now, be quick, be quick,  
rut with the heat for the cold, cold, is coming:  
small hands unfold in sleep from pitiful lace  
stirring in archways, the forfeit head  
crowds like a child between unfamiliar breasts  
and the hand smooths hair that is a stone tomorrow.

Red eyes tomorrow, the small terrible bundle  
sucking its way to fall next harvest's hero—  
sleep while you can, pale girl, nurse your good  
surrender  
and Mary holy—behold a virgin shall conceive:  
Magdalen, convertite, you under cross and thunder  
your mercy on this glum boy doing—  
before new birds perch on the mind's dry branches  
the shark and the buzzard inherit the earth, the sea's  
jaw closes,  
I will watch for you, sleep unfearing.

*For the leaves fall from the tree feather by feather  
and the tree itself will tumble and you not know it.*

*Fire Watching*  
*June 1941.*



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HERBERT CORBY

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*Poem on Joining the Royal Air Force,*  
1941

Now, in the windy pause before invasion,  
before the Spring with her elements of disaster  
strikes from her eastern flats with a sick sun rising,  
—with glacier calamity invading from tomorrow—  
I, leaving home for uniform, consider  
the drowning past that made me, evil and sorrow.

History rears before us like a wave,  
its high white head poised while we catch a breath,  
while sun is torn from sky, and cowed or brave  
we dare the disaster or the new adventure:  
like the huge sea the terrible eye of death  
stares over the white and question of our winter.

Poised in this halted moment, I consider,  
—The prison movements of a life that leads  
now, to the hangar and the bright propeller,  
from child in pinafore to now blue-grey,  
leader of nesting gangs, inventor of deeds  
of mock adventure under the climbing tree.

School, with country voices, the rural air,  
football, colours, wonder at smiling girls,  
the awkward kisses, awareness of a star,  
groping at hymnal words to praise and flatter,  
work in the staring lab, with its glittering aisles,  
lounging at park gates, to grin and chatter.

Striving in blind slow circles, and from the shadow  
glitters of knowledge, brief starlight to the sense,  
more world than in the ball and the green meadow:  
above the tinkling lights the bell light burning,  
ladders of poetry, love, the friendly dance,  
but no height assuaging the secret yearning.

Swinburne one summer. The decadent and dashing,  
friends in romantic moods, talking the night  
on Parliament Hill, with all London lit and flashing,  
and poetry in the bright air, running the wind;  
moody after wine, watching the eastern light  
follow the boast and echo in the mind.

Names that recur and falter in recurring:  
names close like places, heady in the bar,  
when exalted with beer, new moods were stirring,  
when, sentimental over whores, I learned my lesson  
and swearing to the beer's brown range I swore  
more than enough of fidelity and passion.

Room off Soho, poetry and conversation,  
knocks on the door, the dim lights and drawn curtain,  
the careful view, the poised consideration;  
—and so behold me, suspicious of good luck,  
anxious to be gallant, but nothing certain  
in the haze of afternoon and haze of book.

O now, surveying past I see the product  
of beer, of talk, and laughter from the window,  
of failure where I meant most to succeed:  
more devastated than Poland I see that promise  
broken and all its childish lights in shadow,  
and wound and scar are over, earn no medals, no alms.

Surveying this I consider myself, no longer  
confident or rash, not heady with words,  
no more the sure debater or Helen's singer,  
but poor in mind, since lax, and not eager  
to prove the little stamp of all the gods,  
not proud with poetry, not red with anger.

And in the half-lit moments before leaving  
the holding things of love, the value lessens  
I see the dwindled sense that was not living,  
and all my urge was doubtful faith or nothing,  
my deft beliefs were cultivated prisons,  
though there was poetry,—singing and loving.

And now I take a man's state by a number  
and wrong will be the measurements I learned  
somewhere once, in a decorative summer.  
I go to aid the battle and may now die  
a watching failure not many can comprehend,  
available for death on land, on sea, in sky.

### *Sonnet, August 1940*

If, when I'm dead and dust, some miracle  
stirs in my heart and sets the dead dream yearning,  
and dream, released, walks on the glittering hill,  
and down where water glowed, where bloom was  
burning,  
most I'd regret the pavements by the river  
lost to my eyes, and all the historic Thames  
from rural springs where silver poplars quiver  
down through its spires and little glancing streams:  
—I'll go, my gloomy ghost, to Westminster  
and there recall sad days of this success,

when heart was drab, when faith was as a stranger:  
and by the Thames I love that day I'd swear  
life had ended with luck, and loveliness  
died with the easy view, the loss of danger.

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## LAWRENCE DURRELL

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### *Epitaph*

Here lies Michael of the small bone.  
The pride of the lion is gone home.  
God lend our England such a one.

A knight's memoriam is only love.  
So Michael with his dog on his leg  
To his sweet Vicar is gone above.

His loyalty was better than the people's mud.  
His going down on the jaw of the common dog,  
This was a godly fellow's manoeuvre.

His breath as pure as the great oven of Mary.  
He spoke to God with the tongue of great bell.  
They taste his humour at the centre of the world.

Michael the Englishman of the small bone,  
Simple and pure as water in a spoon,  
God lend our England such a one.

## *Island Fugue*

(to my wife)

When here two candid statues lie  
Under an anaesthetic sun,  
Re-element the world of Donne,  
O drink the enormous sky.

The blue, the cool, the curious sea,  
Her blunt mesmeric pendulum  
Swings in the heart of things to dumb  
Our volumes of philosophy.

Marriage of water with a fin:  
A salt, a silence absolute  
Seems eloquent as flesh and mute  
As Grecian sea's blue skin.

The ocean, bodyguard of graves,  
Utters no psalm for travellers,  
No canticle for mariners—  
Only dumb shrapnel in the caves.

Confess, the limbs are loving-stuff.  
The island's sickle, gold on blue,  
The lizard and the turtle too  
Are furniture enough.

Rough is the black sun's morning breath,  
When, dumb, our statues on the beach,  
My loving fingers scarcely reach  
Beneath the bones to death.

The dolphin and the silken seal,  
Touching the circle of the blue,  
Lope by and try to speak to you,  
But seldom utter what they feel.

The elements in sum are we.  
The gryphon or the submarine,  
Aquarian dawdlers intervene  
Across the reefs of memory.

Beyond the accidents of hazard  
Your treasonable flesh be true.  
This doze of olive be our hue,  
And love as ageless as the lizard.

The green sea's buds are only ships.  
Dare the hypnotic blue to ask  
An answer from your Saxon mask  
To the barbaric world's eclipse.

Here plants have no biography,  
Only transparent water's will,  
By chemistry to fill and fill  
The green assertion of the tree.

Confess, the wheel should turn no faster.  
Time like the dead skin of a snake  
Peels down without the addict's ache  
With daylight for a dancing-master.

Or when these dusky statues lie,  
Under the pollen of a star,  
Concede the crossing of the bar,  
And drink the continual sky.

For, loving all, but one the most,  
When grim the moon's pure death-car paces  
Over our long and sleeping faces,  
I lie beside my ghost.

She tips the cypress' silver trigger—  
Nor the exploding dawn can wake  
The tiny breathings that we take,  
With features imitating *rigor*.

We are such dwellers as the tides  
Push up along the turning planet,  
Who love as lonely as the gannet,  
And where the choric blue divides.

Then let this ballet-dress called you  
Propound its axioms by the score.  
The Raven answers: 'Nevermore,'  
To all we be or do.

### *The Green Man*

Four small nouns I put to pasture  
as lambs of cloud on a green paper.  
my love leans like a beadle at her book,  
her smile washes the seven cities.

I am the spring's greenest publicity,  
that a poem is all wrist and elbow.  
O I am not daedal and need wings,  
my oracle kisses the black wand.

one great verb I dip in ink  
for the tortoise who holds the earth:  
a grammar of fate like a map of China,  
as wrinkles sit in the hand of a girl.

I enter my poem like a son's house:  
the ancient thought is: nothing will change.  
but the nouns are back in the bottle.  
I ache and she is warm, was warm.

*In a Time of Crisis**(for Nancy)*

My love on Wednesday letting fall her body,  
From upright walking won by weariness,  
As on a bed of flesh by ounces counted out,  
Softer than snuff or snow came where my body was.

So in the aboriginal waterways of the mind,  
No words being spoken by a familiar girl,  
One may have a clear apprehension of ghostly matters,  
Audible, as perhaps in a sea-shell's helix.

The Gulf Stream can rub soft music from a pebble,  
Like quiet rehearsal of the words 'Kneel Down';  
And cool on the inner corridors of the ear  
Can blow on memory and conscience like a sin.

The inner man is surely the native of God,  
And his wife a brilliant novice of nature.  
The woman walks in the dark like a swinging lantern,  
A white spark blown between points of pain.

We do not speak, embracing with the blood,  
The tolling heart marking its measures in darkness  
Like the scratch of a match, or the fire-stone  
Struck to a spark in the dark by a colder one.

So lying close, an enchanted boy may hear,  
Soon from Tokio the crass drum sounding:  
From the hero's hearth the merry crotchet of war.  
Flame shall swallow the lady.

Tall men shall come to cool the royal bush,  
And over the grey waters the bugler's octaves  
Publish aloud a new resurrection of terror.  
Many shall give suck at the bomb's cold nipple.



We are the tiny lords and ladies in waiting,  
Kneel on a sharp equator between possible climates;  
For us they reserve the monarch's humiliations,  
To be pricked in the heart by a queen's golden pin.

Empty your hearts—or fill from a purer source,  
That what is in a man can weep, having eyes,  
That what is Truth can speak from the responsible dust,  
And O the rose be in the middle of the great world.

### *Letter to Seferis the Greek*

No milestones marked the invaders,  
But ragged harps like mountains here;  
A text for Proserpine in tears, worlds  
With no doors for heroes and no walls with ears,  
Yet snow, the anniversary of death.

How did they get here? How enact  
This clear severe repentance on a rock,  
Where only death converts, and the hills  
Into a pastoral silence by a lake,  
By the blue Fact of the sky forever?

'Enter the dark crystal if you dare,  
And gaze on Greece.' They came  
Smiling, like long reflections of themselves  
Upon a sky of fancy. The red shoes  
Waited among the thickets and the springs,  
In fields of unexploded asphodels,  
Neither patient nor impatient, merely  
Waited, the born hunter on his ground,  
The magnificent and humorous Greek!

We will never record it: the black  
Choirs of water flowing on moss,

The black sun's kisses opening  
Upon their blindness, like two eyes,  
Enormous, open in bed against one's own.

Something sang on the firmament.  
The past, my friend, compelled you,  
The charge of habit and of love.  
The olive in the blood awoke,  
The stones of Athens in their pride  
Will remember, regret, and often bless.

And in your victory my thoughts  
Went back to the island embattled,  
The lion of mercy in her hours,  
Deserted by the poets, with no songs  
But the uniform shining eyes  
Of her young lovers, the peers of the lion.

Kisses in letters from home:  
Crosses in the snow: now surely  
Lover and loved exist again  
By a strange communion of darkness.  
Those who went in all innocence,  
Whom the wheel disfigured: whom  
Charity will not revisit or repair,  
The innocent who fell like apples.

Consider how love betrays us:  
In the conversation of the prophets  
Who daily repaired the world  
By profit and loss, with no text  
On the unknown quantity  
By whose possession all problems  
Are only ink and air made words:  
I mean friends everywhere who smile  
And reach out their hands.

Anger inherits where love  
Betrays: iron only can clean:  
And praises only crucify the loved  
In their matchless errand, death.  
Remember the earth will roll  
Down her old grooves, and spring  
Utter swallows again, utter swallows.

Others will inherit the sea-shell,  
Murmuring to the foolish its omens,  
Uncurving on the drum of the ear  
The vowels of an ocean beyond us,  
The history, the inventions of the sea:  
Upon all parallels of the salt wave  
To lovers lying like sculptures  
In islands of smoke and marble,  
Will enter the reflections of poets  
By the green wave, the chemical water.

I have no fear for the land  
Of the dark heads with aimed noses,  
The hair of night, and the voices  
Which mimic a traditional laughter:  
Nor for a new language where  
A mole upon a dark throat  
Of a girl is called 'an olive'.  
All these things are simply Greece.

Her blue boundaries are  
Upon a curving sky of time,  
In the dark menstroom of water,  
The name of islands like doors  
Open upon it; the rotting walls  
of the European myth are here  
For us, the industrious singers,  
In the service of this blue, this enormous blue.

Soon it will be spring. Out of  
This huge magazine of flowers, the earth  
We will enchant the houses with roses,  
The girls with flowers in their teeth,  
The olive full of charm: and all of it  
Given. Can one say that  
Any response is enough from those  
Who have a woman, and an island and a tree?

I know only that this time  
More than ever we must bless  
And pity the darling dead: the women  
Winding up their hair into sea-shells,  
The faces of meek men like dials,  
The great overture of the dead playing,  
Calling all lovers everywhere in all stations  
Who lie on the circumference of ungiven kisses.

Exhausted rivers ending in the sand.  
Windmills of the old world winding  
And unwinding in musical valleys your arms.  
The contemptible vessel of the body lies  
Lightly in its muscles like a vine:  
Covered with nerves: and like an oil expressed  
From the black olive between rocks,  
Memory lulls and bathes in its dear reflections.

Now the blue lantern of the night  
Moves on the dark in its context of stars.  
O my friend, history with all her compromises  
Cannot disturb the circuit made by this  
Alone in the house, a single candle burning  
Upon a table in the whole of Greece.

Your letter of the 4th was no surprise.  
So Tonio has gone? He will have need of us.

The sails are going out over the old world.  
Our happiness here, on a promontory  
Marked by a star is small but perfect.  
The calculations of the astronomers, the legends  
Which the past believed in, did not happen here.  
Nothing remains but joy, the infant joy,  
(So quiet the mountain in its shield of snow,  
So unconcerned the faces of the birds,)  
With th' unsuspected world somewhere awake,  
Born of this darkness, our imperfect sight,  
The stirring seed of Nostradamus' rose.

*Kalamata, Greece, 1941.*

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## GAVIN EWART

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### *Sonnet*

The point where beauty and intelligence meet,  
Where intersecting lines cross and divide,—  
Happy were I to lie between those feet  
Or by the rare and warm and lovely side—  
You are the centre of my moving world,  
The cold Ideal to which I daily move  
Although iron flags of battle are unfurled,—  
You are not yet, though might still be, my love,  
And I, before the happy, tough battalions  
Engulf me or the frozen seas of Norway,  
Have still my dreams of cities and of dalliance  
But most of you as standing in a doorway,  
Who might, though I so dissipate my life,  
Be mistress or, fear of the young, a wife.

*7th May 1940.*

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*The Bofors A.A. Gun*

Such marvellous ways to kill a man!  
An 'instrument of precision', a beauty,  
The well-oiled shining marvel of our day  
Points an accusing finger at the sky.  
—But suddenly, traversing, elevating madly  
It plunges into action, more than eager  
For the steel blood of those romantic birds  
That threaten all the towns and roads.  
O, that man's ingenuity, in this so subtle,  
In such harmonious synchronization of parts,  
Should against man be turned and be complaisant,  
The pheasant-shooter be himself the pheasant!

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*JAMES FORSYTH*

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*To My Wife*

You're in my mind.  
I did not bring you there.  
You should be where my hands can touch your hair;  
where your four eyelids drawn across your eyes  
express that gem of ultimate extasies—  
our tear.

You should be here to let me care.  
I care.  
But in a mind concern can only stare,  
restrain the hands  
and hate what put you there—  
this war.

You're in my mind.

Your belly—swan against my hand—is there.

Your sweet breasts droop like clouds and in the air,  
as shiny, limping rooks and magpies flap  
from tree-tops which my eyes let in—despair  
erects its famine lusts in this fat land;

for I'm in Surrey and you're in my mind.

You're in my mind, dear, cramped against a brain  
that has you where my body cannot claim  
more than this care—

to stifle what I'd smother in your hair,  
your breasts, your milk-white belly. Oh my love!  
you're lying in myself too high above  
the roots of longing level with my thighs.

I cannot even plant across your eyes  
what brushed your lashes and re-sealed our joy,  
dreamed like alabaster behind bars  
and moulded in this full mind his pale face

You're in my mind

with him for whom you care

who now must suck the milk you must infuse  
with this despair—

this separation curse embraced in war.

*March 1941.*

### *Take Back This Time*

Take back this time.

I find it has a flaw in it, besides  
others have had their hands on it before.

Take back this time;  
whoever lays a claim,  
who has a home;

whoever has a happy future planned.  
I bought it with my blood  
in hope that fear  
of what it is might pay—  
peace profiteer.

Take back my time of steel,  
the splintered plinth,  
the pillar sectioned in a street of glass;  
and take back Milton,  
back his marble corpse  
laid horizontal somewhere near the Bank.  
Take back London and its mangled sewers,  
the dead lines  
and these ducts of rich and poor  
gushing from the house laid in the road.  
Take back the possible wrath of your probable God.

Take back the aerial darkness  
and the sounds  
which made the pitted morning  
Take the toll:—  
the tower clock stripped at midnight near the club  
where people in a basement burrowed joy;  
where now the empty ambulances cool,  
waiting the rubble-gleaners' sweated crop.

of limp old age, the pale  
and the screaming boy.

Take back the time,  
content-in-pain, content-in-dirt and slime  
Content in England and the island man;  
and do not be amazed that I accuse you  
as cruel as the cruel enemy.  
For he shall be loved and hated and brought down;  
but you shall hope to forget it and to go on.



Take back this time of slowing the stopping clock.  
The clock is stopped.  
Take back your idle talk of peace  
and work, war on disease, and work on the rock,  
work on the ruin.

*January 1941.*

### *Take the Eye to the Bud*

Take the eye to the bud. Love  
the Spring fact, not the traditions of Spring.  
Take the eye to the spur-bud of the beech,  
the green minutiae of birch,  
the flopped fleur-de-lys of the chestnut tree;  
and enrich the field of facts we have.

Take for instance the dove—  
too conventionally the animate sign  
of ambitions to be up tree-top high  
in a world of troubled roots;  
of lusts for lack-of-lust  
and a feathered breast where lust is.  
Take the same and a different dove  
and by its adaptation to wind and a reptile strain  
admire and admit its mechanism.  
Thrill to see (and let the thrill rest)  
not the surrealist chasm in her chest  
with detail stalactites of coloured guts,  
but feel as the eye follows the white unique one  
through her wood,  
the keel of the delicate ribs  
and the insectivorous beak.

Take the fact. It is not dull.  
It is not scientific in your sense.

It is not that defence against the will  
which kills.

Take toll of the act—which moulds us all—  
and leave The Soul! Leave The Soul!

*Spring 1941.*

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## G. S. FRASER

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### *A Letter to Anne Ridler*

A bird flies and I gum it to a concept,  
You trim your concept to the flying bird,  
Your round words plopping open out in rings.  
May your love's dreams be innocent and absurd  
For dreaming of your verses while he slept  
You mastered these oblique and tricky things. . . .

But I was a reporter on a paper  
And saw death ticked out in a telegram  
On grey and shabby sheets with pallid print  
So often, that it seemed an evening dram  
Of solace for the murderer and the raper  
Whose love has grown monstrous through stint.

I was a poet of this century  
Pursued by poster-strident images  
And headlines as spectacular as a dream  
Full of cartoonists' dolls with paper visages;  
I had no spare time over for reality,  
I took things largely to be what they seem.

I had a headache from the endless drum,  
The orator drumming on his private anger,

And the starved young in their accusing group  
When I had written and could write no longer  
Over my shoulder seemed to peer and stoop.  
The adequate perspectives would not come.

It was not real, the news I got from London,  
But made the immediate avenue unreal  
And sapped my habits of their privilege:  
Dreamy the granite in the evening sun  
And like a vision, in their swoop and wheel,  
The pigeons fluttering at Union Bridge.

The Communists were always playing darts,  
The Spanish War survivor would not talk,  
The Tory member only talked of peace.  
In spring, the ash-buds blossomed in our hearts,  
The tangle blossomed on the slimy rock,  
The private impulse sought its vain release. . . .

And in December on the ballroom floor  
The girls in flowering dresses swayed and whirled,  
And no girl leant on my protective arm.  
From all the height of speculation hurled,  
I stood and hesitated by the door;  
I felt the pathos and I felt the charm. . . .

Oh, I had hardly any will or shape,  
Or any motive, but a sort of guilt  
That half attracted them and half repelled;  
My hand shook, and my glass of sherry spilt,  
I wore a sort of silence like a cape.  
The old historic constant pattern held.

And when at midnight in my lonely room  
I tried to integrate it all in verse  
The headlines seemed as distant as the girls.  
If sex was useless, history was worse.

A terrible remoteness seemed my doom  
Whether I wrote of bayonets or curls. . . .

So the stiff stanzas and the prosy lines  
Accumulated on my dusty shelf,  
A family joke, like any secret vice:  
Dud bombs, damp rockets, unexploded mines.  
'This sort of writing isn't really nice.  
Oh, George, my darling, can't you be yourself?'

You can; and I would praise your studied art,  
Dry and stiff-fingered, but more accurate  
Than all my brilliant angers and my blind,  
Hot, hurt perceptions, energized with hate:  
Would praise your calm perspectives of the mind  
So coloured with the pathos of the heart.

For my slack words were awkwardly heroic,  
Your noble mood assumes no airs at all:  
A rock of anger in this world unstable,  
Me other people's sufferings made a stoic,  
But you, a hostess at our hungry table,  
Are kind; your atmosphere is germinal.

Loving the charity of women's love,  
Too much a household pet, I see in you  
The gentle nurture that now curbs my grief  
As I grow tall, beyond that budding grove  
Of all the beautiful beyond belief  
Within whose shade my windflower passions blew,

Private to me, their shy and secret sun:  
Who now with other private suns compete  
And seek in man's inverted mode such love  
As nerves the will to enter and complete  
Its terrible initiation of  
Man to these virtues that from pain are won.

And the sick novice whimpers for his home  
Who shall be hurt and horribly alone  
Before the historic vigil lets him sleep.  
Yet for such heart, such pity might atone  
And such an Ithaca for those who roam  
Far, that they may at last return and weep.

Why do the towers of Troy for ever burn?  
Perhaps that old Jew told us, or perhaps  
Since women suffer much in bearing us  
We also must show courage in our turn,  
Among these forks and dreaded thunder-claps,  
Against an endless dialectic tearing us. . . .

Or freedom, say, from family love and strife  
And all the female mystery of a room  
That half supports and half imprisons us  
May tear a man from mother, sister, wife,  
And every soft reminder of the womb.  
Dead Freud in lost Vienna argued thus.

I hardly know! But Fritz, who's now interned,  
(Sober and well-informed like all his race)  
Told me this war might last, say, seven years;  
But right would triumph then, the tide be turned,  
Unless indeed (the night fell on his face)  
Our hopes are just illusions like our fears.

Perhaps in London, say, in seven years,  
We'll meet, and we will talk of poetry,  
And of the piety of homely things,  
A common past, the flowering library  
In which the awkward spirit perseveres  
Until a world of letters shines and sings. . . .

Unless the vigilant years have numbed my face,  
The long humiliation soured my heart,

The madman's silence boxed my veering mood:  
Let time forgive me, if I fall apart,  
And fall, as many souls have fallen from grace,  
Through just and necessary servitude.

Or if we never meet, remember me  
As one voice speaking calmly in the north  
Among the muslin veils of northern light;  
I bore the seed of poetry from my birth  
To flower in rocky ground, sporadically,  
Until I sleep in the unlaurelled night.

### *Sonnet*

My simple heart, bred in provincial tenderness,  
And my cold mind, that takes the world for theme,  
With local pain, with universal remedy,  
Avert the real, disturb the noble dream:

And if my hand could touch you timidly,  
Or I could laugh with you, and worry less  
About the loud guns laughing over Europe,  
I might find a local remedy, a province's hope:

Or if I had the hard steel mind of Lenin,  
The skill, or even the rage of Cataline  
Against the corrupt, the comfortable. Then in

The pages of history one page might be mine.  
But for my heart my mind must lose its scope,  
And for my mind my heart must give up hope.

## *You by the Unfamiliar River Walking*

*(For Tom Scott)*

You by the unfamiliar river walking,  
On the high bank over the pale green sky of your  
dream,  
Where the faithless lovers return, and the new faces  
Offer their unavailing solace, and your face meets with  
your face,  
The drowned Narcissus, with the red mane streaming,  
Streaming with a wake of bubbles, and a woman  
laughing,  
The lost one lovely, on the high bank walking,  
The whole air bubbling with drowning laughter;  
And rigid and jointed the glittering meccano tower  
Raises itself like a phallus on the scruffy plain,  
And from the height you know the fear of falling:  
Or propped like a toppling pillar, among the ferns  
(‘Her name was Fearn, which suggested the scene!’)  
By the unasked-for love of a last night’s acquaintance,  
You caress her chastely with a natural gesture,  
Her hand on your heart and yours on her silken thigh,  
Consoling her as she sighs (the words in the dream  
Become for once even the waking poem),  
‘Oh, that I might flow for ever on your restful juices!’  
You become aware, later in the dream, half waking,  
Of the railway station at midnight, iron and glass,  
Disquieting noise of whistles, voices, hands,  
Papers and chocolate—‘Oh remember, write!’—  
Hell-shriek of siren and the tunnel gulps:  
The poem is digested in the dark.

And waking you are aware  
Of the latent content of all these manifest beauties,

Of all these terrors ; the uncertain border  
Between the unreal sufferings of the real,  
The soldiers hungry for food and words and love,  
Gobbling at scraps like half-starved rats, and the real  
Pathos and nobility of your personal fantasy:  
You in a trivial suicide's world  
Loyal to the long way round, the majestic circuit  
Of the human year, its summer of love and strife,  
And the peace and death of its recurrent winter.

Oh, you, at least, may you have a long summer.  
Oh, let the way to your death at least be long.  
Choose the circuitous way, and not like me  
The green plants grown too white in their grey cellar,  
And be for me, when my frail fingers snap  
At last, the last of many fraying threads,  
A true memorial, a juster image,  
On my white screen a huge projected shadow,  
The tall, the lonely, and the too much loved ;  
So from my grave may green fulfilment grow,  
My ghost find peace in its authentic hero.

### *Lament*

Down by the drumming autumn of the river  
Is a griever's evening, cracker of crazy leaves,  
Is fire-snap, whip-snap, is bright weather dancing:  
Is a swan-reft river, inconsolably grieves.

Is suave his image high from drowning river,  
High from these nodding branches and green pools,  
This swan, whom waters of my desolation  
Would sully sky for, but this not consoles.



Would say these waters do like salt sea lap  
For a smooth rock, that is ribs and is lips;  
Is a salt-crusted autumn, with salt-crisp leaves  
Are sea that crackles and loops and whips.

Say autumn and ocean, swan and rock, are all  
But other truths for other images:  
My swan or rock whom broke my truth against  
I must pursue my water's truth, he says.

Now lap and ebb on this receding shore  
Whose grains no grip have, nor no surging breast  
For to arrest my tide or breast my river:  
To me it was never given, ever, to have rest.

### *Apology of a Soldier*

Death, like a fluorescent screen,  
Isolates on the image called memory  
Dumb sockets, angles of bone  
And sucks the living nerves from history. . . .  
And the historian must wonder how  
These creaking bones could move  
And what could give them force,  
For him the eyes and mouth a blotted shadow  
And bloodless all the sensual orators:  
We, who lived earlier than  
Our intelligent anatomists,  
Discovered that love, courage, honour  
Could not irradiate  
Except on a conceptual slide  
Time's cellular discord.

For on a slide, cell fibres  
From a cancerous tissue

May be bombarded with radium  
And lose their tenacious life;  
But out of the slide and in the body,  
Perhaps the body perishes too,  
Perhaps a body that we loved.  
So, when a people perishes,  
One organism suffers:  
Cut across and you will murder  
Roots, plants, grain of the land.  
Good and evil and possibility  
Existing only like the dreams of the invalid,  
In his sickness and pain incredulous:  
Saying, 'What have I done for this?  
Why did this have to be me?'  
And the doctors soothe and inject morphia  
But they have not an answer.

Should I say, life has not our ideas?  
(I have loved beauty and knowledge but not life.)  
It does not charge things,  
As we charge them, with values and potentialities:  
It attaches itself indifferently  
To the parasite and the host,  
And in the parasite,  
In the rebellious growth  
(Because it is simpler)  
May have more vigour, even, than in the host.

For I have seen films  
Of cancer cells, splitting, stretching,  
And doubling, in a mad dance,  
Like a dream landscape; these magnified cells,  
Their growth speeded up, a day in a second,  
Resembling in their tormented profiles  
Momentary spotted elephants:  
And I have seen films of war, bombs

Destroying the momentary profile  
We call the wall of a house ;  
Smoking rifles destroying  
The momentary identity we call a man.  
And I could not see that reason had part in it,  
Or much that reason could do :  
Except to watch and know it,  
Like a careful hunter : that the time in the end might  
    come  
To isolate and analyse and kill.

It is not yet, it is not yet,  
And I am part of the pattern :  
For it is no use to ask now,  
'Whom have I hated or injured, what have I done ?'  
There is no exemption, there is no answer  
Except the cellular discord of Time.

And all I can say is, wait, watch :  
All I can say is, your chance may come :  
Whom should I blame, who is my enemy,  
Who of this evil was forewarned by me ?  
No man I think.

    So I shall praise them all,  
The good and brave, who fight on either side :  
The strong in blood who yielded to love's tide,  
The faint and feeble, who with sullen hearts  
Still learned to dance the dance and play their parts.

But most I praise the lucky and the wise  
Who will escape at last with undimmed eyes :  
With no bright vision that might make them blind :  
And what all seek may all the lucky find,

The proper verse, the proper sentiment :  
The one profession for which one was meant :

The one who could be haughty and relent  
And who could make the cup of pleasure full:  
May they find pity with the beautiful.

And for the larger and unlucky set,  
I have no words, my rhymes have all run out:  
Dumb sockets, angles of bone. . . .  
Historians will admire the stoic quality  
Of what your task has left:  
But we, who knew the lips and eyes of liberty,  
May feel bereft.

### *Poem for M. J.*

These nervous and golden evenings, under the lamp  
You will turn strict and pale to another smile,  
And other hands will help you off with your coat,  
And other voices will praise and qualify  
Discussing a mood or a style  
And raised as your sentences die with a jerk in your  
throat.  
And outside at night it will be dark and damp  
And against the raw damp sky  
Your medallion will offer a scare to the sidling glance.  
Oh, perhaps in some house you pass there will be  
music,  
Perhaps people will dance.

Here I am soothed by the sad, the satiable sea,  
Here I ride with a trident the blue imperial wave,  
Here I am drowned by the hands, voices, and faces,  
That move, sound, and behave,  
Here I am smiling to think it is not you,  
My dear, or your sort that intermit the wars  
To root us from our vegetating places,

It's not for you the towers of Troy shall burn ;  
But you are like that patient Ithaca  
To which, from all the headaches of the sea,  
After ten years of labouring at their oars,  
Some few, the luckier voyagers, return.

### *To a Scottish Poet*

Goddess or ghost, you say, by shuddering,  
And ominous of evil to our land,  
Twisting to ugliness the mouths that sing,  
Parching the lover's moist and balmy hand,

Goddess or ghost, you say, by silence known,  
The silence ticking in the rotten wood  
Like our numb pain, that can no longer groan :  
A grief so old, it gives the mind no food.

I also on bleak nights in Causewayend  
Where the slate sky distorts the slaty stone  
And the shawled women to their burrows wend,  
Have felt my country suffering alone.

The slate sea splashes on the slaty pier  
In lost St. Andrews, where no poets now  
Defy the crocodile to shed its tear  
Or take what time the bitter years allow,

And the same sea is loud in Aberdeen :  
Passing the gas-works and the fish-and-chips  
One comes in summer on the radiant scene,  
The golden beach, the girls with golden hips,

The sun that cooks and savours all their sex :  
Then I have thought my country might arise

Like these half-sleeping girls with tawny necks  
 And summer's sensual softness in their eyes.  
 These skies bled warmth: and while my blood stays young,  
 That starving peace, or this protracted war,  
 Vows broken, or friends lost, or songs unsung  
 Shall leave no permanent and vexing scar..  
 Goddess or ghost, you say, by shuddering,  
 And ominous of evil to our land. . . .  
 I say, defy her, while our blood can sing;  
 While we stand insolent, as poets stand.

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## DAVID GASCOYNE

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### *Miserere*

*'Le désespoir a des ailes  
 L'amour a pour aile nacré  
 Le désespoir  
 Les sociétés peuvent changer.'*

PIERRE JEAN JOUVE.

### TENEBRAE

'It is finished.' The last nail  
 Has consummated the inhuman pattern, and the veil  
 Is torn. God's wounds are numbered.  
 All is now withdrawn: void yawns  
 The rock-hewn tomb. There is no more  
 Regeneration in the stricken sun,  
 The hope of faith no more,  
 No height no depth no sign,  
 And no more history.

Thus may it be: and worse.  
And may we know Thy perfect darkness.  
And may we into Hell descend with Thee.

## PIETA

Stark in the pasture on the skull-shaped hill,  
In swollen aura of disaster shrunk and  
Unsheltered by the ruin of the sky,  
Intensely concentrated in themselves the banded  
Saints abandoned kneel.

And under the unburdened tree  
Great in their midst, the rigid folds  
Of a blue cloak upholding as a text  
Her grief-scrawled face for the ensuing world to read,  
The Mother, whose dead Son's dear head  
Weighs like a precious blood-incrusted stone  
On her unfathomable breast:

Holds Him God has forsaken, Word made flesh  
Made ransom, to the slow smoulder of her heart  
Till the catharsis of the race shall be complete.

## DE PROFUNDIS

Out of these depths:

Where footsteps wander in the marsh of death and an  
Intense infernal glare is on our faces facing down:

Out of these depths, what shamefaced cry  
Half choked in the dry throat, as though a stone  
Were our confounded tongue, can ever rise:  
Because the mind has been struck blind  
And may no more conceive  
Thy Throne.

Because the depths  
Are clear with only death's  
Marsh-light, because the rock of grief  
Is clearly too extreme for us to breach:  
Deepen our depths,  
And aid our unbelief.

KYRIE

Is man's destructive lust insatiable? There is  
Grief in the blow that shatters the innocent face.  
Pain blots out clearer sense. And pleasure suffers  
The trial thrust of death in even the bride's embrace.

The black catastrophe that can lay waste our worlds  
May be unconsciously desired. Fear masks our face ;  
And tears as warm and cruelly wrung as blood  
Are tumbling even in the mouth of our grimace.

How can our hope ring true? Fatality of guilt  
And complicated anguish confounds time and place;  
While from the tottering ancestral house an angry  
voice

Resounds in prophecy. Grant us extraordinary grace,

O spirit hidden in the dark in us and deep,  
And bring to light the dream out of our sleep.

## LACHRYMAE

Slow are the years of light:  
and more immense
Than the imagination. And the years return  
Until the Unity is filled. And heavy are  
The lengths of Time with the slow weight of tears.  
Since Thou didst weep, on a remote hill-side



Beneath the olive-trees, fires of unnumbered stars  
 Have burnt the years away, until we see them now:  
 Since Thou didst weep, as many tears  
 Have flowed like hourglass sand.  
 Thy tears were all.  
 And when our secret face  
 Is blind because of the mysterious  
 Surging of tears wrung by our most profound  
 Presentiment of evil in man's fate, our cruellest  
 wounds  
 Become Thy stîgnăţă. They are Thy tears which fall.

## EX NIHILO

Here am I now cast down  
 Beneath the black glare of a netherworld's  
 Dead suns, dust in my mouth, among  
 Dun tiers no tears refresh: am cast  
 Down by a lofty hand,

Hand that I love! Lord Light,  
 How dark is Thy arm's will and ironlike  
 Thy ruler's finger that has sent me here!  
 Far from Thy Face I nothing understand,  
 But kiss the Hand that has consigned

Me to these latter years where I must learn  
 The revelation of despair, and find  
 Among the debris of all certainties  
 The hardest stone on which to found  
 Altar and shelter for Eternity.

## SANCTUS

Incomprehensible—

O Master—fate and mystery

And message and long-promised

Revelation! Murmur of the leaves  
Of life's prolific tree in the dark haze  
Of midsummer: and inspiration of the blood  
In the ecstatic secret bed: and bare  
Inscription on a prison-wall, 'For thou shalt  
persevere  
In thine identity . . .': a momentary glimpsed  
Escape into the golden dance of dust  
Beyond the window. These are all.

Uncomprehending. But to understand  
Is to endure, withstand the withering blight  
Of winter night's long desperation, war,  
Confusion, till at the dense core  
Of this existence all the spirit's force  
Becomes acceptance of blind eyes  
To see no more. Then they may see at last;  
And all they see their vision sanctifies.

## MISERERE

Whose is this horrifying face,  
This putrid flesh, discoloured, flayed,  
Fed on by flies, scorched by the sun?  
Whose are these hollow red-filmed eyes  
And thorn-spiked head and spear-stuck side?  
Behold the Man: He is Man's Son.

Forget the legend, tear the decent veil  
That cowardice or interest devised  
To make their mortal enemy a friend,  
To hide the bitter truth all His wounds tell  
Lest the great scandal be no more disguised:  
He is in agony till the world's end,

And we must never sleep during that time!  
He is suspended on the cross-tree now  
And we are onlookers at the crime,  
Callous contemporaries of the slow  
Torture of God. Here is the hill  
Made ghastly by His spattered blood

Whereon He hangs and suffers still:  
See, the centurions wear riding-boots,  
Black shirts and badges and peaked caps,  
Greet one another with raised-arm salutes:  
They have cold eyes, unsmiling lips;  
Yet these His brothers know not what they do.

And on His either side hang dead  
A labourer and a factory-hand,  
Or one is maybe a lynched Jew  
And one a Negro or a Red,  
Coolie or Ethiopian, Irishman,  
Spaniard or German democrat.

Behind His lolling head the sky  
Glares like a fiery cataract  
Red with the murders of two thousand years  
Committed in His name and by  
Crusaders, Christian warriors  
Defending faith and property.

Amid the plain beneath His transfixed hands,  
Exuding darkness as indelible  
As guilty stains, fanned by funereal  
And lurid airs, besieged by drifting sands  
And clefted landslides our about-to-be  
Bombed and abandoned cities stand.

He who wept for Jerusalem  
Now sees His prophecy extend  
Across the greatest cities of the world,  
A guilty panic reason cannot stem  
Rising to raze them all as He foretold;  
And He must watch the drama to the end.

Though often named, He is unknown  
To the dark kingdoms at His feet  
Where everything disparages His words,  
And each man bears the common guilt alone  
And goes blindfolded to his fate,  
And fear and greed are sovereign lords.

*The turning point of history  
Must come. Yet the complacent and the proud  
And who exploit and kill, may be denied—  
Christ of Revolution and of Poetry—  
The resurrection and the life  
Wrought by your spirit's blood.*

*Involved in their own sophistry  
The black priest and the upright man  
Faced by subversive truth shall be struck dumb,  
Christ of Revolution and of Poetry,  
And the rejected and condemned become  
Agents of the divine.*

*Not from a monstrance silver-wrought  
But from the tree of human pain  
Redeem our sterile misery,  
Christ of Revolution and of Poetry,  
That man's long journey through the night  
May not have been in vain.*

*A Wartime Dawn*

Dulled by the slow glare of the yellow bulb ;  
As far from sleep still as at any hour  
Since distant midnight ; with a hollow skull  
In which white vapours seem to reel  
Among limp muddles of old thought ; till eyes  
Collapse into themselves like clams in mud. . . .  
Hand paws the wall to reach the chilly switch ;  
Then nerve-shot darkness gradually shakes  
Throughout the room. *Lie still.* . . . Limbs twitch ;  
Relapse to immobility's faint ache. And time  
A while relaxes ; space turns wholly black.

But deep in the velvet crater of the ear  
A chip of sound abruptly irritates.  
A second, a third chirp ; and then another far  
Emphatic trill and chirrup shrills in answer ; notes  
From all directions round pluck at the strings  
Of hearing, with frail finely-sharpened claws.  
And in an instant, every wakened bird  
Across surrounding miles of air  
Outside, is sowing like a scintillating sand  
Its throat's incessantly replenished store  
Of tuneless singsong, timeless, aimless, blind.

Draw now with prickling hand the curtains back ;  
Unpin the blackout-cloth ; let in  
Grim crack-of-dawn's first glimmer through the glass.  
All's yet half-sunk in Yesterday's stale death,  
Obscurely still beneath a moist-tinged blank  
Sky like the inside of a deaf-mute's mouth. . . .  
Nearest within the window's sight, ash-pale  
Against a cinder-coloured wall, the white  
Pear-blossom hovers like a stare ; rain-wet

The further housetops weakly shine; and there,  
Beyond, hangs flaccidly a lone barrage-balloon.

An incommunicable desolation weighs  
Like depths of stagnant water on this break of day.—  
Long meditation without thought.—Until a breeze  
From some pure Nowhere straying, stirs  
A pang of poignant odour from the earth, an unheard  
sigh

Pregnant with sap's sweet tang and raw soil's fine  
Aroma, smell of stone, and acrid breath  
Of gravel puddles. While the brooding green  
Of nearby gardens' grass and trees, the quiet flat  
Blue leaves, the distant lilac mirages, are made  
Clear by increasing daylight, and intensified.

Now head sinks into pillows in retreat  
Before this morning's hovering advance;  
(Behind loose lids, in sleep's warm porch, half hears  
White hollow clink of bottles,—dragging crunch  
Of milk-cart wheels,—and presently a snatch  
Of windy whistling as the newsboy's bike winds near,  
Distributing to neighbours' peaceful steps  
Reports of last night's battles;) at last sleeps..  
While early guns on Norway's bitter coast  
Where faceless troops are landing, renew fire:  
And one more day of War starts everywhere.

*April 1940.*

## J. C. HALL

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### *Journey to London*

From the Welsh wick aflame in the globe of winter  
I came across England to love and anger,  
Came from that mountainous indifference  
To where my hopes are, your lips, our danger.

Riding the three ranges, the high midland  
Where history piled stone on stone together  
Furnishing from grey stone our politics  
And the dull principles that slay my brother,

Riding the three ranges, I left England  
In the rage of sunset and all Oxfordshire  
To the cold glory of its toppling spire,  
Came down to darkness and a city's fear.

O London, from the pellucid flame of Wales,  
I your citizen and twenty others  
Crossed from the Chiltern daylight into darkness,  
The night that drowns our enemies and lovers,

Journeyed from grey stone to bombs exploding  
Our politics and prayers, to a new anger  
Striking from grief this poetry. We came  
To the heart of love, to the heart of danger.

### *Ode Above Winchester*

Is it a year now since our bodies lay  
in Hampshire under the dark uncorniced sky,  
lapped in the fume and humour of the earth?

---

Hours like pulses ticked our history by,  
a sleepless fever burned the dew away.

Flung on those grassy prongs of joy and grief,  
nomads of the roofless tempestuous steppe,  
we were the agony our future was,  
the hope, love, fear, and the blood's quick leap  
up the prophetic vein to chart our death.

Living and loving there we had good cause.  
Though over the water from Southampton's shore  
a national order fell and the last bomb  
crushed out an army, our hearts were sure  
in that interminable night of sterner laws.

O government of grass, green parliament,  
tree, tongue of bird, wood, tragic wind,  
in your democracy we filled our lung,  
learnt political passion, were first kind,  
spun the whole world in the brain's firmament.

Yours was the universe we waited for,  
brilliant sunlight and a thousand birds  
swinging their pinions over Dorsetshire.  
From time's historical most bitter words  
we built the poetry we suffer for.

So in this ode is an incredible year,  
the whole agony our future was, the song  
the bird whistled over the French pasture.  
At dawn's danger we rose from the grassy prong  
and rode down with Alfred into Winchester.

*May 1941.*



## DESMOND HAWKINS

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### *Night Raid*

The sleepers humped down on the benches,  
The daft boy was playing rummy with anyone he could  
get,  
And the dancing girl said, 'What I say is,  
If there's a bomb made for YOU,  
You're going to get it.'  
Someone muttered, 'The bees are coming again.'  
Someone whispered beside me in the darkness,  
'They're coming up from the east.'  
Way off the guns muttered distantly.

This was in the small hours, at the ebb.  
And the dancing girl clicked her teeth like castanets  
And said, 'I don't mind life, believe me.  
I like it. If there's any more to come,  
I can take it and be glad of it.'  
She was shivering and laughing and throwing her head  
back.  
On the pavement men looked up thoughtfully,  
Making plausible conjectures. The night sky  
Throbbled under the cool bandage of the searchlights.

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J. F. HENDRY

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*London Before Invasion, 1940*

Walls and buildings stand here still, like shells.  
Hold them to the ear. There are no echoes even  
of the seas that once were. That tide is out  
Beyond the valleys and hills.

Days dawn and die, while the city assumes a distance  
of stars.

It is the absence of the heart  
In the ebbing seas of heaven,  
An ebbing beyond laughter, and too tense for tears.

Now imagination floats, a weed, on water's vacancy.  
Faces of women, lit with conscience past or future  
Of men gone, wear one garland of stone features.  
Flowers have a girl's irrelevance, and mind is no  
prescience.

Flood-tides, returning, may bring with them blood  
and fire,  
Blenching with wet panic spirit that must be rock.  
May bring a future tossed and torn, as slippery as wrack.  
All time adrift in torrents of blind war.

*From 'Four Seasons of War'*

## I

Flood is upon us. Furies illimitable cast  
Chaos of green blade, florid with mud, across  
My thumbnail landscape, where the ground and grass  
—Two giants in tunic of khaki and green gaiters—

Scissor and blind the eyes that have beheld.  
See this wrinkled tree, faith floating drowned  
In a welter and clash of heedless, head-on waters,  
Inert and dead as any seasoned soldier.  
Never is destruction enough to halt the hunger of  
war's wintering wind.  
Nor shall time's end unravel, spaced like stars, its  
wreck and holocaust.

## II

Sheer watery visions, the guilt of statesmen and rabble,  
Rob us of mind, breath, body and blood to mint  
This ruthless purity, this camouflage of world, where  
Futility multifold breathes fog over all rock.  
O Charlie, fond friend, and web of awareness! Quick  
Limbs like lilies skirting the lips of trenches; or  
Pupils, like the nuts of autumn, hanging ripe with  
melancholy;  
On some beach of suffering his face is shaken like  
pebbles.  
And that deception of all fire is his thought smudged,  
whorled and bludgeoned; wholly  
Betrayed; as he is beaten lifeless back upon all our own  
four elements.

*Elegy No. 5*

Living is a drama you have lived and overgrown  
As peace in the green moss grows over stone.  
Nor is this death. We living are the dead.  
I wear a stone in the heart, like fruit,  
Whose immanence and slow eclipse of the root  
Soul discerns on the senses' river bed.

An Easter day in Austria lit our love,  
From the wick of dark, and tallow snow, a candle  
I shield against the wind with my hand.  
From the spires of the years there fluttered a dove.  
What unknown conjurer wove them together?  
Spinning the top of the season's weather

In circles of incandescence and the Spring's  
Unutterable lilac? Voiced and trim, the edge  
Of a thousand violins iced with singing  
Dances crickets through the memory. Knowledge  
Breaks if ground as keen as they,  
Breaks, as my heart breaks, or this day.

Spider of patience, I try to find you in a tangle  
Of memories, hidden perhaps like an anemone.  
I too conjure you up through the ganglia  
Of nerves' fear; and, more than sick money,  
Child, or science, seek through the brain's storm  
Two flowers I dropped, your face and form.

Smile your lovely smile upon my impudence!  
Let your white laughter of teeth see my sorrow  
Tremble through the leaves of my blind fingers!  
All my being is an animal in anger  
And in pain, confounded by your absence.  
Birds, beasts and flowers know nothing of tomorrow.

And yet, o more than bird's eye, beast's foot, or the tense  
Trumpet of an ear of flowers I miss you, dear one, now.

### *Lament*

Now the bones of many are the flutes of death.  
Wind pipes its laughter where the marrow was.  
Its whistle is the emptiness of grief.  
These splitting days pitch like a ship that is piled

Upon reefs and every second springs a hole  
Through which the waters of our lives rise in a trough;  
Screened, we see the future in a haze  
Of images that sharpen into truth,  
Foreshadowing sore experience and the frost  
Of anger, till the cold cruel vision of the coming time  
is focused.

This grief is a spiked plant, dabbled with dorsal fins:  
Distiller of sorrow: action grown barren: war.  
Scattering wide his tears the airman tends  
In vegetable bombs the roots of his own grief.  
He weeps wild emptiness who sheds his blood.  
Hands and limbs, mechanically bound,  
Lose purpose in this path like a plough in a drift,  
The long choked furrow we inherit, fear.  
These are the ghostly cacti beg alms from the rains  
Or barb some armoured ambush for sweet wells of  
God.

Still, a man in Galilee whose seas know no division  
Walks the waves of anger with his love.  
With his blood and with his tears treads down  
Fountains of green vengeance. Bodily one with the  
peal  
Of bells, from the tower of his heart on the hill  
Are tolling, tolling, sounds of joy throughout  
All exploration's gardens, yet the blood-beaked ravens  
Build foreboding nests within our minds:  
Or harbour doom and prophesy his fate  
And ours, who are the living embodiment of his  
wounds.

*A Winter of War*

The world exudes this death  
In a language of signs and seasons.  
Now it lies with the eyes of a moth  
On the eaten heart of a rose.

I write this under his sign,  
The crooked cross on a bombing plane:  
While pagan heath and oaken  
Parliament contract or crack  
Under the frost of palsy,  
Stripped and scattered, our drowned lives  
Innumerable as leaves  
Dance his rainy whirlpool.

All foliage, of tree or bough,  
Yields to the peering hunter.  
Whose tracks, invisible as winter,  
Bulge white and huge as snow.

With an iron fist our hour  
Strikes upon chilled air  
And afterward sound ascends  
From the bell's icy throat.  
Though death lie all around  
Like lichen on a moat,  
From the frozen tongue, still lolling,  
Flows the living speech of the soul.

Two wintry fingers give scissors  
Rifle earth's innocence. The legs are straw.  
Fears are his birth. He is the scarecrow  
Standing amidst a pang of unkempt grasses.

## *The Bombed Happiness*

Bring me, o morning, a branch whose roots are  
silence.

Wring from the living shapes of trees a breakwater  
Scattering, blind and dumb, the white storms of a  
future

Loud with barren voices. How shall they influence  
The shy one, wild and wordlessly weaving a way  
Among heart's foliage, to plunge, inspired,  
Down upon love's awareness like a bird?

Here no seasons surge. Although the leaves fall,  
Numbering the deaths of those unknown to history,  
This year they tell no mere autumnal story.

Calm summery courage is a ghost that haunts each  
house

Of brick or bone. Behind an old man's daze of eyes  
Spring lurks dew poised within a bud of tears.  
There is no winter known to human will.

Today the proud shall scamper to hide their pride.  
Man's heart alone asserts death's insignificance.

The sun's hour halts. Time is one vast cloud.

Joys even in giant endeavour crack like bells

Despite tongue's eloquence. Whole cities fall.

And yet, o acting dry-rot on the tyranny of the times,  
The silence of the mad and bombed is its own balm.

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SIDNEY KEYES

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*Advice for a Journey*

The drums mutter for war, and soon we must begin  
To seek the country where they say that joy  
Springs flowerlike among the rocks, to win  
The fabulous golden mountain of our peace.

O my friends, we are too young  
To be explorers, have no skill nor compass,  
Nor even that iron certitude which swung  
Our fathers at their self-fulfilling North.

So take no rations, remember not your homes—  
Only the blind and stubborn hope to track  
This wilderness. The thoughtful leave their bones  
In windy foodless meadows of despair.

Never look back, nor too far forward search  
For the white Everest of your desire ;  
The screes roll underfoot, and you will never reach  
Those brittle peaks which only clouds may walk.

Others have come before you, and immortal  
Live like reflections. Their still faces  
Will give you courage to ignore the subtle  
Sneer of the gentian and the iceworn pebble.

The fifes cry death and the sharp winds call.  
Set your face to the rock ; go on, go out  
Into the bad lands of battle, the cloud-wall  
Of the future, my friends, and leave your fear.



Go forth, my friends, the raven is no sibyl;  
Break the clouds' anger with your unchanged faces.  
You'll find, maybe, the dream under the hill—  
But never Canaan, nor any golden mountain.

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## FRANCIS KING

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### *History Between*

In the far-away North, where the gulls call,  
Wheeling and falling from the cliff's ledges to the sea,  
And the tongue of the tide edges the shingle with  
foam,  
There will be no sighing for our dying summer  
fantasy,  
But only the grieving of those who are leaving home.  
When the wind whips the felt complacency of these  
hills  
To a fine tension suited to our mood,  
And the last light draws tight the evening fields,  
I shall not remember what we two have said:  
I shall only remember that you may be dead.

Already we have forgotten the dying swan of Europe,  
Floating Ophelia-like to snatches of old songs,  
Keats coughing blood, and Rimbaud in his ruined city.  
Van Gogh, who saw the sun-flower growing in his  
brain,  
And Shelley, wounded for a nation's wrongs.  
And what of us, the nameless?  
We have loved a little, and been sad together:  
We have not smeared our blood on history's curtain,  
Or held a candle to the universal dark.

In time's vertical kaleidoscope, where only pain is  
certain,

We shall be forgotten, with this quiet room  
And all that makes us glad or sad tonight.

Yesterday, in the warm South, walking beneath the  
elms,

The summer swathed me in its glittering lakes of sight  
and sound,

And the oleander petals drifted across the lawn,  
Like shadows spinning on an ivory screen:

I thought of you in the fairy-tale North;  
Not only the gulls and the sharp impatient rain,  
But the whole map of history lay between.

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## LAURIE LEE

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### *Oh, Larch Tree with Scarlet Berries*

Oh, larch tree with scarlet berries  
sharpen the morning slender sun  
sharpen the thin taste of September  
with your aroma of sweet wax and powder delicate.

Fruit is falling in the valley  
Breaking on the snouts of foxes  
breaking on the wooden crosses  
where children bury the shattered bird.

Fruit is falling in the city  
blowing a woman's eyes and fingers  
across the street among the bones  
of boys who could not speak their love.

I watch a starling cut the sky  
a dagger through the blood of cold,  
and grasses bound by strings of wind  
stockade the sobbing fruit among the bees.

Oh, larch tree, with icy hair  
your needles thread the thoughts of snow  
while in the fields a shivering girl  
takes to her breasts the sad ripe apples.

### *Juniper Holds to the Moon*

Juniper holds to the moon  
a girl adoring a bracelet;  
as the hills draw up their knees  
they throw their jasmine girdles.

You are a forest of game,  
a thought of nights in procession,  
you tread through the bitter fires  
of the nasturtium.

I decorate you to a smell of apples,  
I divide you among the voices  
of owls and cavaliering cocks  
and woodpigeons monotonously dry.

I hang lanterns on your mouth  
and candles from your passionate crucifix,  
and bloody leaves of the virginia  
drip with their scarlet oil.

There is a pike in the lake  
whose blue teeth eat the midnight stars  
piercing the water's velvet skin  
and puncturing your sleep.

I am the pike in your breast,  
my eyes of clay revolve the waves  
while cirrus roots and lilies grow  
between our banks of steep embraces.

*Look into Wombs and Factories  
and Behold*

Look into wombs and factories and behold  
nativities unblessed by hopeful stars,  
the sleek machine of flesh,  
the chubby bomb,  
lying together in one dreadful cradle.

We are no longer ignored  
in this easy agony of creation ;  
kings mark our breathing with a cross  
and grant us honour undesired,  
our vulnerability knows the trick of slaughter,  
our pulse the useful trump of death.

This world, this comfortable meadow,  
gay with surprise and treasure,  
is common now with harvests of despair ;  
and mouths eager to sing,  
to taste the many flowers of love,  
open to tongues of bullets  
and moan their shattered palates on the ground.

## ALUN LEWIS

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### *Christmas Holiday*

Big-uddered piebald cattle low  
The shivering chestnut stallion dozes  
The fat wife sleeps in her chair  
Her lap is filled with paper roses  
The poacher sleeps in the goose-girl's arms  
Incurious after too much eating  
All human beings are replete.

But the cock upon the dunghill feels  
God's needle quiver in his brain  
And thrice he crows: and at the sound  
The sober and the tipsy men  
With one accord leap out of bed  
And start the war again.

The fat wife comfortably sleeping  
Sighs and licks her lips and smiles  
But the goose-girl is weeping.

### *Easter in Christmas*

*What dark and terrible shadow is swaying in the wind?*

Beautiful are thy dwellings, Lord of Hosts,  
The choir-boys in white go softly singing;  
The world is full of pale frustrated ghosts.

Lovers cannot reach each other;  
Stars are burnt by an insane fire;

The night is red and loud ; the choir-boys  
Sing softly ghostly vespers of desire.

*What dark and terrible shadow is swaying in the wind?*

An agitator and two thieves are swaying in the wind.

### *Autumn, 1939*

The beech boles whiten in the swollen stream ;  
Their red leaves, shaken from the creaking boughs,  
Float down the flooded meadow, half in dream,  
Seen in a mirror cracked by broken vows,

Water-logged, slower, deeper, swirling down  
Between the indifferent hills who also saw  
Old jaundiced knights jog listlessly to town  
To fight for love in some unreal war.

Black leaves are piled against the roaring weir ;  
Dark closes round the manor and the hut ;  
The dead knight moulders on his rotting bier,  
And one by one the warped old casements shut.

### *All Day it has Rained*

All day it has rained, and we on the edge of the moors  
Have sprawled in our bell-tents, moody and dull as  
boors,

Groundsheets and blankets spread on the muddy  
ground.

And from the first grey wakening we have found  
No refuge from the skirmishing fine rain  
And the wind that made the bell-tents heave and flap  
And the taut wet guy ropes ravel out and snap.

All day the rain has glided, wave and mist and dream,  
Drenching the gorse and heather, a gossamer stream  
Too light to move the acorns that suddenly  
Snatched from their cups by the wild southwesterly  
Pattered against the tent and our up-turned dreaming  
faces.

And we stretched out, unbuttoning our braces,  
Smoking a woodbine, darning dirty socks,  
Reading the Sunday papers—I saw a fox  
And mentioned it in the note I scribbled home—  
And we talked of girls and dropping bombs on Rome  
And thought of the quiet dead and the loud celebrities  
Exhorting us to slaughter and the herded refugees;  
Yet thought softly, morosely of them, and as  
indifferently  
As of ourselves and those whom we for years  
Have loved and will again  
Tomorrow maybe love:—but now it is the rain  
Possesses us, the darkness and the rain.

And I can remember nothing dearer or more to my heart  
Than the children I watched in the woods on Saturday  
Shaking down burning chestnuts for the school-yard's  
merry play,  
Or the shaggy patient dog who followed me  
Through Sheet and Steep and up the wooded scree  
To the Shoulder o' Mutton where Edward Thomas  
brooded long  
On death and beauty till a bullet stopped his song.

### *Fever*

I felt the universe with my fingers; and it was  
compounded of bone and sinew, like the naked  
loins of Theseus, the slayer, the young hero,

And of softness, like petals, like pools of water  
glimmering between pine roots and birches when  
the moon is ripe for harvest,

And of blood, like the roar of a torrent, a landslide, a  
battle, delirious weeping or the laughter of  
children.

But it was night; and the universe was grey like  
charred rafters, and like fungus pocked with red  
stars, like fever.

I took its stem and plucked the rain-swollen toadstool;  
and ate it, tasting its bitterness in my mouth.

Convulsed, I saw the stars reeling outside my window,  
the Sword flashing and the Plough wrecked in the  
branches;

And through the barred grating I clamoured for relief;  
for sunlight wrapped in an envelope, for a day's  
dole;

And I signed my name on God's register with  
quivering fingers.

Oh my love! Why did I dream this dream in my bed;  
feeling your nearness and the panting of your  
belly and the gentle murmuring of your breath,

Only to wake to the loneliness of the deserted and the  
agony of silence and the mockery of my desire's  
trembling mirage?

Oh my love!  
who like the sunlight  
Can strike and blind and parch.



*To Edward Thomas*

On the way up from Sheet I met some children  
Filling a pram with brushwood ; higher still,  
Beside Steep church an old man pointed out  
A small white stone upon a flinty spur  
Projecting from the high autumnal woods.  
I doubt if much has changed since you came here  
On your last leave: except the stone: it bears  
Your name and trade:—‘To Edward Thomas, Poet.’

Climbing the steep path through the copse I knew  
My cares weighed heavily as yours, my gift  
Much less, my hope  
No more than yours.  
And like you I felt sensitive and somehow apart,  
Lonely and exalted with the friendship of the wind  
And the silent afternoon enfolding  
The dangerous future and the smile.

I sat and watched the berried dusky ridge  
Of yew trees, deepened by oblique dark shafts,  
Damming the flame of red and gold and russet  
That leapt from beech and ash to birch and chestnut  
Along the downward arc of the hill’s shoulder ;  
And sunlight streaming from the windblown branches  
Softly explore the distant wooded acres  
And plotted tilth, and with discerning fingers  
Touch the white farmsteads one by one with lightness,  
Until it reached the Downs, whose soft green pastures  
Went slanting sea- and sky-wards to the edge  
Where sight surrenders and the mind alone  
Can find the sheeps’ track and the grazing.  
And for that moment life appeared  
As lovely as the view I gazed upon.

Later, a whole day later, I remembered  
This war and yours, and your weary  
Circle of failure and your striving  
To make articulate the groping voices  
Of mist and snow and dripping branches  
And winds that screamed against the cottage eaves  
And ringed the candle-flame with lurid dumb  
Shadows that jiggled distorted round your head—  
While in the stricken room there was no ease  
For you or Helen or those small perplexed  
Children of yours who only wished to please.

Divining this, I knew the voice that called you  
Was quiet and neutral as the sea's  
Arc, or the grey horizon; stronger  
Than Night's immediate grasp, the limbs of velvet  
Oblivious as the blood; and growing sharper,  
More urgent as all else dissolves away—  
Projected books and anniversaries  
Of weddings cold as history—  
The dream beyond the fact, and farther still,  
The final fact beyond that final dream,  
The endless rides of stormy-branched dark  
Whose fibres are a thread within the hand  
Till suddenly, at Arras, you possessed that hinted land.

### *The Public Gardens*

Only a few top-heavy hollyhocks, wilting in arid  
beds,  
Frayed lawns,  
Twin sycamores storing the darkness massively under  
balconies of leaf,  
And an empty rococo bandstand—strangely unpopular  
Saturday evening in the public gardens.

But wait: These take their places:

A thin little woman in black stockings and a straw hat  
with wax flowers,  
Holding a varnished cane with both hands against her  
spent knees  
As she sits alone on the bench, ah oddly  
Alone and at rest:

An older wealthier lady, gesticulating and overdressed,  
Puffily reciting the liturgy of vexations  
To her beautiful companion,  
The remote and attractive demi-Parnassian  
Whose dark hair catches the sunlight as she listens  
With averted face and apparent understanding:

A boy with his crutches laid against the wall  
Pale in the shadow where the hops hang over  
In light green bundles;—is he, too, waiting  
For one who perhaps  
Prefers another?

And I, forgetting my khaki, my crude trade,  
And the longing that has vexed and silenced me all the  
day,  
Now simply consider the quiet people,  
How their pattern emerges as the evening kindles  
Till the park is a maze of diagonal lines, ah far  
Too fine to catch the sun like the glittering webs  
The spiders have folded and flung from the fading  
privet.

*Only the children, passionately,  
Snap my drifting lines with laughter  
As they chase each other among the benches  
In and out of the dreaming gardens.*

---

*Postscript for Gweno*

If I should go away,  
Beloved, do not say  
'He has forgotten me.'  
For you abide,  
A singing rib within my dreaming side;  
*You always stay.*  
And in the mad tormented valley  
Where blood and hunger rally  
And Death the wild beast is uncaught, untamed,  
Our soul withstands the terror  
And has its quiet honour  
Among the glittering stars your voices named.

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*C. DAY LEWIS*

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*The Stand-To*

Autumn met me today as I walked over Castle Hill.  
The wind that had set our corn by the ears was  
    blowing still:  
Autumn, who takes the leaves and the long days,  
    crisped the air  
With a tang of action, a taste of death; and the wind  
    blew fair

From the east for men and barges massed on the other  
    side—  
Men maddened by numbers or stolid by nature, they  
    have their pride

As we in work and children, but now a contracting  
will  
Crumples their meek petitions and holds them poised  
to kill.

Last night a Stand-To was ordered. Thirty men of us  
here  
Came out to guard the star-lit village—my men who  
wear  
Unwitting the season's beauty, the received truth of  
the spade—  
Roadmen, farm labourers, masons, turned to another  
trade.

A dog barked over the fields, the candle stars put a  
sheen  
On the rifles ready, the sandbags fronded with ever-  
green:  
The dawn wind blew, the stars winked out on the  
posts where we lay,  
The order came, Stand Down, and thirty went away.  
Since a cold wind from Europe blows back the words  
in my teeth,  
Since autumn shortens the days and the odds against  
our death,  
And the harvest moon is waxing and high tides  
threaten harm,  
Since last night may be the last night all thirty men go  
home,

I write this verse to record the men who have watched  
with me—  
Spot who is good at darts, Squibby at repartee,  
Mark and Cyril, the dead shots, Ralph with a  
ploughman's gait,  
Gibson, Harris and Long, old hands for the barricade.

Whiller the lorry-driver, Francis and Rattlesnake,  
Fred and Charl and Stan—these nights I have lain awake  
And thought of my thirty men and the autumn wind  
    that blows  
The apples down too early and shatters the autumn  
    rose.

Destiny, History, Duty, Fortitude, Honour—all  
The words of the politicians seem too big or too small  
For the ragtag fighters of lane and shadow, the love  
    that has grown  
Familiar as working-clothes, faithful as bone to bone.  
Blow, autumn wind, upon orchard and rose! Blow  
    leaves along  
Our lanes, but sing through me for the lives that are  
    worth a song!  
Narrowing days have darkened the vistas that hurt my  
    eyes,  
But pinned to the heart of darkness a tattered fire-flag  
    flies.

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## LOUIS MACNEICE

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### *Bar-room Matins*

Popcorn peanuts clams and gum:  
We whose Kingdom has not come  
Have mouths like men but still are dumb

Who only deal with Here and Now  
As circumstances may allow:  
The sponsored programme tells us how.

And yet the preachers tell the pews  
What man misuses God can use:  
Give us this day our daily news

That we may hear behind the brain  
And through the sullen heat's migraine  
The atavistic voice of Cain:

'Who entitled you to spy  
From your easy heaven? Am I  
My brother's keeper? Let him die.'

And God in words we soon forget  
Answers through the radio set:  
'The curse is on his forehead yet.'

Mass destruction, mass disease:  
We thank thee, Lord, upon our knees  
That we were born in times like these

When with doom tumbling from the sky  
Each of us has an alibi  
For doing nothing—Let him die.

Let him die, his death will be  
A drop of water in the sea,  
A journalist's commodity.

Pretzels crackers chips and beer:  
Death is something that we fear  
But it titillates the ear.

Anchovy almond ice and gin:  
All shall die though none can win;  
Let the Untergang begin—

Die the soldiers, die the Jews,  
And all the breadless homeless queues.  
Give us this day our daily news.

*July 1940.*

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FRED MARNAU

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*Mary*

Mary, straw in the stable was your bed  
and now with the kings you are well acquainted.  
But sometimes still you are blazing red  
and through the dark with which our lives are painted  
you see all, see them raw and naked.

And everything has fallen from God's hands.  
When he began the world he gave his blood.  
He can no longer understand his ends.  
Alas, how he spoke proudly then: the work is good!  
and bade the angels squandering commence!

Death lurked about in the beginning,  
sat in the garden's grasses killing time  
and thought the poppies' sultry red most pleasing.  
But God was in love, he had a dream  
and could not hear the voices' scornful grinning.

Mary, let him sleep now, let the old man lie.  
A storm has devastated world and bliss.  
Drunken the boats out of the harbour sway,  
Death is a big man now, he owns a horse,  
his coat's aflame, God will be punished cruelly.

And he will cover Heaven with his coat  
and put his hand upon God's mouth and eyes,  
drive like a lord the angels off the road—  
Mary, lips of God, of no more use,  
O give no kiss! Give rain and endless night.

(Translated by E. O. SIGLER)



*London Elegies: No. 1*

How could it help to say: rains never end—  
more colourless the word than it can mean.  
How could it help to say: the lads they put  
in battledress their arms will later on  
be severed from the shoulder, from the knee their foot,  
or else:  
that some will not return.  
(Thus on its playground can a child be lost)  
Who can weigh it all?

Did no tree ever break wild from the earth  
with whom you were one—like fire and smith—  
and would not leave you? So perhaps it does no good  
to stand in silence by the field and watch,  
stand like that sailboat in the Thames below  
Westminster where its mast tops touch embankment  
trees  
and closed to it are all the lower bridges.  
Only when autumn fog obliterates  
the features of all things, gives them new meaning,  
the goblins hoist their crimson sails. But fog remains.  
The ship goes home. And surely it can do no good  
to stand in silence by the homeland and to watch.  
(Translated by E. O. SIGLER)

*London Elegies: No. II*

This we had never known: the sea to build a town  
greater than Amsterdam; that money bears the sound  
of gold more so than guilders. Rome in its splendour  
did not possess such riches. And the orient:  
tell me one town where silver doors are borne by  
silver hinges

upon black wood; with cloisters where the prophets  
sleep in gold.

You were to say: it is as proud as this.

This we had never known: to stand here by the sea and  
speak:

this boat leaves for South Africa tomorrow,  
and: He has gone to Sweden; She has died in  
Leningrad;

and that so many friends are friends no more,  
the homeland is no longer home.

Why should it? Where is constancy?

(Translated by E. O. SIGLER)

### *1939, October*

The land is freezing, soldiers line the station  
who have forgotten where their country is.  
The girls are dreaming of heroic actions  
and they know more of Death and Victories.

You stand at the station, waving your tears.  
The train leaves, now smoke is all you can see  
No angels now, to go down on their knee  
and love: they also know fear.

Horror is knocking at every door  
and through our window throws its grudge.  
The blind man must be led over the bridge,  
but we are tired and cannot see any more.

The grass grows yellow and the seas are weary,  
tonight the night is filled with jazzy blare.  
On the dark waters swims the moon, the ferry  
taking with it the fear and the war.

(Translated by E. O. SIGLER)

## *House in Carpatho-Russia*

The dead are bathing in the air,  
the table steals, sucks in all warmth,  
like a white grave stone stands the bed:  
and only you, your mouth, remains

and no-one gives a smile, alas,  
somewhere a silent carriage waits.  
The wind throws rags up on the roof,  
the window looks at you: friend, stay awake!  
for death has won you in a game of dice.

## *Lovesong*

Southwinds blow, lover.  
I bring you cherries, tender fruit and mellow wine.  
I slept in the heather—snow chased me off.  
I love hot lips and cool hands.

Southwinds blow. I stagger drunkenly, lover!  
Yes, I am drunk, too fresh in these stormy fields  
and heavy still like driftwood in autumnal waters,  
for I come from the North, from the land  
of the shouting songs and the white men who are  
ashamed  
of sin and sadly wander about in their desolate towns.

Southwinds blow.  
Milder stars drift to the frigid zones  
Do not be cold, lover—southwinds are like warm  
breath.  
Lead me, lover, for my breast is glowing sand,  
desert sand.  
My gait is heavy, I am ill and broken.

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I will keep wine in cool cellars,  
I will learn to smile and to sin,  
I will bring flowers from the slopes;  
I will kiss the dew off your lips.

Heal me, lover, for I am tired,  
I came ailing from the North  
into southerly winds.

Lover with her little mouth of sun  
and her loins like swaying palm-trees:  
I will call you Peter, Black Peter!  
and slowly darken in your sun,  
in your heavy, half-closed eyes.

*(Translated from the German by E. O. SIGLER)*

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## NEIL MCCALLUM

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### *Stand-To*

The sea at dawn is grey, sombre as metal,  
With dull unburnished strength.  
The light expands till the horizon,  
Once more defined, encircles our day.  
In the tufted grass and the sea-pinks  
Our rifles lie, clean, with bolts oiled,  
Our pouches hard with rounds.  
A metal world of rifle, sea and sky.

The cramped limb moves; the eyes stare outwards.  
Only behind is life where the fields stretch  
And new smoke lifts from silent houses.

We forget the pre-vigil days  
The time of fretting and proposition  
Of clamorous words and fear be-devilled plans.  
Perhaps we were wrong then,  
And all the holy words  
Were cried in a madman's dream:  
Peace and freedom  
Dwelled in the clarity of delirium;  
The scales of justice balanced neatly  
Not now, but in the future of a mirage.

We have returned to faith  
For the argument did not reach its conclusion.  
The words were buried by bullets, and the guns  
    drowned our songs.  
Here, leaning on the side of the weapon-pit,  
A trickle of sand on our boots  
There is only the tense eye and the tired mind  
That does not plead or suffer but has learned patience.

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## NICHOLAS MOORE

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### *Come, My December Lady, to my Side*

Come, my December lady, to my side:  
Feel there the tick and tock of the mixed seasons  
As you hold hours in your maiden hand.  
The dog spring bites the bone that holds the winter  
And year's beginning is my season's end.

Time's in the clock that blows your lovely hair,  
Black as the raven's midnight or the owl's,  
And, where the bat twists to and fro, your arms

Hold old December's monk-heart to your breast,  
The leg stands cold and naked to the moon.

For by the hours you tell the summer's swallows  
In dart and dive mix with the blue-teared pool,  
From the beginning to the end in love.  
Where lashes flicker on the most steady eyes:  
I come to you to meet each folded fist.

### *The Ruin and the Sun*

#### I

Do I make my disasters clear? The wind from Mexico  
Blows up its rumours and I let it go,  
Or does it chase a white sun from the heavens?  
Here or elsewhere I hear the sounds of woe,  
Blown up from the babe to the young man of evening.

Or I stand lonely in a Japanese harbour, and shoot  
looks

At my ministers in China. Misery,  
My misery, runs like a fable over Europe.  
The people lift their hands and wait the end.  
O Democracy, where is your sunny tree?

I read this terrible story in the times, futile  
The black bomber and the little cunning chasers,  
Futile the barb and barricade in England,  
Or the sentry posted on the proper hill.  
This is England, and England's ruin still.

#### 2

Do I make my disasters clear? The wind is speaking.  
I am a ghost only in the sound of its echo,

Having no life, but in its whistle of woe,  
I am the cowed crowd in the Berlin cafe,  
I am the Italian sorrow on the olive tree.

The wind blows. This is my fable. I, the poet, mad  
With my own misery, and man's, am sad  
For all the world's daughters, the young with a star,  
The old who had never yet got there,  
And for allman, the mad, the wicked, the glad.

I am the man of Paris and Madrid,  
The man with a cloud of disaster over my head,  
And faster, in England here, it comes on me, the wind  
That blows only this nightmare on mankind,  
That shows the fascist strong, and the democrat blind.

Hitler is love's taunting fable, the earth gone wrong,  
Life like an eagle to pin and cage his man,  
But all his flights bring him no further, no  
Reward outlasts his dream. His is success  
That feeds itself on failure. This is man's.

I see from all my windy speech no heaven,  
For I am a ghost of a shadow under a dream:  
The skilful madman makes things seem what they  
    seem,  
And all my words flutter out with the candle.  
Light tonight is only the speaking wind.

## 3

The disasters are clear, from the wind in summer  
That ruffles love's happy pair on the heathen hill,  
From the look in the eyes that sees a fiend in the night,  
The tears of good-bye, and the universal sorrow.  
Bombs fall on the city and on cattle in the meadow.

Now we live like Eskimos under a shadow,  
But under a shade more terrible than the Northern  
lights,  
Under the fire of bomber, fighter, and guns,  
Love can but take its minute, and wish for one more  
Hug against the rattling cold, one more kiss.

For here the disaster is clear. Aware of this,  
Like men breathing gas in a dream, we wonder,  
Listen to the mocking speeches of the unjust,  
Those who on their tongues have a new world to give,  
But lie in their hearts, that they may live.

O monsters of gold, effigies of gain, O bankers,  
With the people's curse on you, how now hope to  
survive,  
How hope to keep the profit in the till.  
You are safe while the chains of war continue to hold,  
But like an earthquake the last day will arrive.

Disaster on disaster, but the people still live,  
I, the sad man, and my darling, and many other ones,  
In Berlin, in London, in Paris, all in the sunshine,  
Who know their places well, and know the future.  
The wind from Mexico blows. My misery

Hangs like the people's star on the chestnut tree.  
The wind blows. The disaster is here and clear.  
The tree in the wind sings differently. I see  
The young man of evening lift his face in the sun,  
Out of Europe's ruin Love come to everyone.



*With the Ill Wreaths that Time has  
given You*

With the ill wreaths that time has given you, go, my  
darling  
Who sail like a ship on my tongue.

Time has given me words, as though I were an alder  
By Cagney's Pond, to weep that the waters are slipping,  
shuffling

With foam on my tongue like a madman  
Through the sluices and the docks.

I have a lazy hand like a duck's  
To tickle the waters and test the pride of your fingers  
that

Round me twist. The ship is yours and the sail,  
So I know you, my darling, for the two islands,

Shell again, as I shall often, the sheets and the slip from  
your breasts,  
Finger there, and love, O and here

Is the long-tongued ship of my poem,  
The poem like a daisy chain, and going through bridges.

*Poem*

*(For Priscilla)*

You look like history. All the bright caravans  
That ended in no more than a madman's whisper,  
The cavalcade of honour that led to death,  
Is history you have lived and suffered beneath.

You look like that girl in an historical town  
Who over seas was seized in exchange for a crown,  
Or the woman who stood burning on a tall pyre,  
Watching the flames consume, as did her desire.

You look like fable. Hung on a willow tree  
The leaves weep for you, and leaves of a bible  
Bear your footprint on every page of the corn,  
Poppy, red with the history you have borne.

Birth is not the end, nor the babe in a stable,  
Happy among straw who was honoured. He found  
History put him on a cross with nails  
And vinegar. That is true still.

You look like history, or rather that historical face  
That blazes through wars and scars with a look of  
peace,  
That has suffered history, is history, and lives  
Like a beacon flaring among historical griefs.

You look like fable, myth, and the fairy tale,  
But you are real as the boy was in the stable.  
What agony is to suffer will still be true,  
Though the future open up like a flower in you.

### *Can we know Birds from Shooting Stars*

Can we know birds from shooting stars  
Or judge the mountains on the moon,  
What height, what shape they are, what heavenly  
craters  
Have been blasted or chiselled from their sides?  
If we can look through telescopes we see  
The shadow of the mountains in the sea.

My dear lady, the frogs are here,  
Crouched in the wet grass of this simple country,  
Make croaks and groans, tread with their delicate feet  
On the flat leaves of lilies. Stars and birds  
Frighten the fishes, frighten us, and we  
Stand under shadows by the watery sea.

O out of words blasted from Spain or Belgium,  
Shot from a vision of guns and bombs, my poem  
Speaks tenderly of the sutured head, the thing  
Lying alone by a broken mound of earth.  
Can we bring heaven nearer than a star,  
Or take the shadow from a world at war?

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## NORMAN NICHOLSON

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### *The Blackberry*

Between the railway and the mine,  
Brambles are in fruit again.

    Their little nigger fists they clench,  
    And hold the branches in a clinch.

Waggons of ore are shunted past,  
And spray the berries with red rust,  
    Which dulls the bright mahogany  
    Like purple sawdust, clogged and dry.

But when the housewife, wind-and-rain,  
Rubs the berry spick and span,

    Compound it gleams like a fly's eye,  
    And every ball reflects the sky.

There the world's repeated like  
Coupons in a ration book;

There the tall curved chimneys spread  
Purple smoke on purple cloud.  
Grant us to know that hours rushed by  
Are photographed upon God's eye;  
That life and leaf are both preserved  
In gelatine of Jesus' blood.  
And grant to us the sense to feel  
The large condensed within the small;  
Wash clear our eyes that we may see  
The sky within the blackberry.

### *Carol for Holy Innocents' Day*

The cat was let out of the bag by an angel  
Who warned them and planned their get-away,  
And told how Herod would make holy with death  
The day that a birth made a holy day.

Herod's men were searching the backalleys,  
They did not see the refugees go,  
Nor how when the child's hands fluttered like sparrows  
His fingers blessed the casual snow.

The boy saw sand white as snow in the desert,  
And watched it thaw to husks of corn;  
And perhaps his merchant uncle showed him  
The first white blossoms of the Glastonbury thorn.

We have hurried the children from a German Herod,  
Whose bombs stretch further than a city's roofs;  
We have brought them westward across the Pennines  
To where the sea like a squadron moves.

They will see the bracken retard and turn rusty,  
And new fronds like clock-springs coil into gear;

Many times they will watch the sea's renewal,  
And oftener than we know the renewal of the year.

In farms among the hills and in small mining towns  
Safe the unmartyred innocents lie ;  
But on the frozen cradle of Europe  
The infant Jesus is left to die.

### *Rockferns*

On quarry walls the spleenwort spreads  
Its green zipfasteners and black threads,  
And pinches tight its unfurled purses  
In every crevice with the cresses,  
As if a blast of dynamite  
Had spattered it upon the slate,  
That where the bluestone spine was broken  
Spores might penetrate and quicken.  
For in the fractures of the rock  
Roots dig further than a pick,  
As, 'though the sinews may not feel it,  
The worm probes deeper than the bullet.  
When this pen is dropped, my hand  
May thrust up in a buckler frond,  
And then my crushed and calcined bones  
Prove better soil than arid stones.  
Why need I fear the bursting bomb  
Or whatsoever death should come,  
If brains and bowels be cast forth  
Splintered to spleenwort on the earth ?  
And if a subtler part may cruise  
Twice round the sun and Betelgeuse,  
My soul shall detonate on high,  
And plant itself in cracks of sky.

*Inscription for a Calendar*

On the world's Medusa-skull  
I see the snaky ringlets curl,  
And from each ear's peninsula  
The coiled plaits hiss across the brow.  
I feel the cloud-light fall like rain  
On lips and nostrils turned to stone,  
And words which once my tongue could speak  
Grow like lichen on my cheek.  
But still some pity trickles through  
The brittle mica of my eye,  
And, as they fall, the pebbly tears  
Slither through the shale of years.

Behind my spine I know that time  
Like sexton prises up the tomb,  
On a sarcophagus of frost  
He jigsaws with the bony past,  
Puts shoulder against rib again  
And builds tomorrow's skeleton.  
And in my heart my hands my head  
I know that bones will bud with blood,  
And flesh upon the gristle grow  
Like rings of new wood on a tree.  
Then my freestone face will crack  
For no Medusa-stare can check  
The blood that gushes through the veins  
Like acid, and dissolves the stones.  
Pain is realler on the cheeks  
Than devil's-tail-like tongues of snakes,  
And only Christ unfleshed atones  
In that re-fleshing of the bones.

*Sonnet for Good Friday*

The time's a tree to hang from as I die,  
While steel thorns spike my wrists into the wood,  
And from my running wounds the anemone  
Drips on the passive soil in scabs of blood.  
There were not lacking those to thrust out tongue,  
Nor those to squabble for my scanty gear,  
Nor those to wish me strength to suffer long  
And break my bones when I could bear no more.  
Malevolence of man's secreted sins  
Is nothing to the agony of sap  
That rises to redemption in my veins  
And gimlets all my flesh with buds of hope.  
Death is less terrible than third-day birth,  
When blood shall blossom on the holy earth.

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*MERVYN PEAKE*

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*Had Each a Voice what would His  
Fingers cry*

His fingers that were trained to bind  
The shadows of his mind  
To paper with slim lead  
Grasp grimmer substance than a pencil's measure.  
  
Not cedar but the trigger's steel  
Is what they feel,  
And in a longer barrel  
Lead of as fleet an impulse waits the pressure.

His perjured fingers have no throats ;  
His wrists no source of sound supports ;  
His crook'd forefinger  
Curls like a tongue, severed and voice-forsaken ;

Had each a voice what would his fingers cry  
But 'Treachery' ?  
Until their shrill pipes echoing up the arms  
Should find and force the tyrant brain to hearken.

*London, 1941*

Half masonry, half pain ; her head  
From which the plaster breaks away  
Like flesh from the rough bone, is turned  
Upon a neck of stones ; her eyes  
Are lid-less windows of smashed glass,  
Each star-shaped pupil  
Giving upon a vault so vast  
How can the head contain it ?

The raw smoke  
Is inter-wreathing through the jaggedness  
Of her sky-broken panes, and mirror'd  
Fires dance like madmen on the splinters.

All else is stillness save the dancing splinters  
And the slow inter-wreathing of the smoke.

Her breasts are crumbling brick where the black ivy  
Had clung like a fantastic child for succour  
And now hangs draggled with long peels of paper,  
Fire-crisp, fire-faded awnings of limp paper  
Repeating still their ghosted leaf and lily.



Grass for her cold skin's hair, the grass of cities  
Wilted and swaying on her plaster brow  
From winds that sweep along the streets of cities:

Across a world of sudden fear and firelight  
She towers erect, the great stones at her throat,  
Her rusted ribs like railings round her heart;  
A figure of wild wounds—of winter wounds—  
O mother of wounds; half masonry, half pain.

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## KATHLEEN RAINE

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### *Envoi: to A.M.*

Take of me what is not my own,  
my love, my beauty, and my poem,  
the pain is mine, and mine alone.

See how against the weight in the bone  
the hawk hangs perfect in mid-air—  
the blood pays dear to raise it there,  
the moment, not the bird, divine.

And see the peaceful trees extend  
their myriad leaves in leisured dance—  
they bear the weight of sky and cloud  
upon the fountain of the veins.

In rose with petals light as air  
I bind for you the tides and fire—  
the death that lives within the flower  
oh gladly, love, for you I bear.

*Angelus*

I see the blue, the green, the golden, and the red,  
I have forgotten all the angel said.

The flower, the leaf, the meadow, and the tree,  
but of the words I have no memory.

I hear the swift, the martin, and the wren,  
but what was told me, past all thought is gone.

The doves, the rainbow, echo, and the wind,  
but of the meaning, all is out of mind.

Only I know he spoke the word that sings its way  
through my blood streaming over rocks to sea,

a word engraved in the bone, that burns within  
to apotheosis the substance of a dream,

that living I shall never hear again,  
because I pass, I pass, while dreams remain.

*On leaving Ullswater*

## 1

The air is full of a farewell,  
deserted by the silver lake  
lies the wild world, overturned;  
cities rise where mountains fall,  
the furnace, where the phoenix burned.

## 2

The lake is in my dream,  
the tree is in my blood,

the past is in my bones,  
the flowers of the wood  
I love with long past loves ;  
I fear with many deaths  
the presence of the night,  
and in my memory read  
the scripture of the leaves—  
    only myself how strange  
    to the strange present come !

### *London, Revisited*

Haunting these shattered walls, hung with our past,  
that no electron and no sun can pierce,  
we visit rooms in dreams  
where we ourselves are ghosts.

There is no foothold for our solid world,  
no hanging Babylon for the certain mind  
in rooms tattered by wind, wept on by rain.

Wild as the tomb, wild as the mountainside,  
a storm of hours has shaken the fine-spun world,  
tearing away our palaces, our faces, and our days.

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## HERBERT READ

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### *To a Conscript of 1940*

*Qui n'a pas une fois désespéré de l'honneur, ne sera jamais un héros.*—GEORGES BERNANOS.

A soldier passed me in the freshly-fallen snow,  
His footsteps muffled, his face unearthly grey ;

And my heart gave a sudden leap  
As I gazed on a ghost of five-and-twenty years ago.

I shouted halt! and my voice had the old accustomed  
ring  
And he obeyed it as it was obeyed  
In the shrouded days when I too was one  
Of an army of young men marching

Into the unknown. He turned towards me and I said:  
'I am one of those who went before you  
Five-and-twenty years ago: one of the many who never  
returned  
Of the many who returned and yet were dead.

We went where you are going, into the rain and the  
mud;  
We fought as you will fight  
With death and darkness and despair;  
We gave what you will give—our brains and our  
blood.

We think we gave in vain. The world was not  
renewed.  
There was hope in the homestead and anger in the  
streets  
But the old world was restored and we returned  
To the dreary field and workshop, and the  
immemorial feud

Of the rich and poor. Our victory was our defeat.  
Power was retained where power had been misused  
And youth was left to sweep away  
The ashes that the fires had strewn beneath our feet.

But one thing we learned: there is no glory in the deed  
Until the soldier wears a badge of tarnished braid;

There are heroes who have heard the rally and have  
seen

The glitter of a garland round their head.

Theirs is the hollow victory. They are deceived

But you, my brother, and my ghost if you can go  
Knowing that there is no reward, no certain use  
In all your sacrifice, then honour is reprieved.

To fight without hope is to fight with grace,

The self reconstructed, the false heart repaired.'

Then I turned with a smile, and he answered my salute  
As he stood against the fretted hedge, which was like  
white lace.

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## ANNE RIDLER

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### *Now as Then*

When under Edward or Henry the English armies,  
Whose battles are brocade to us and stiff in tapestries,  
On a green and curling sea set out for France,  
The Holy Ghost moved the sails, the lance  
Was hung with glory, and in all sincerity  
Poets cried 'God will grant to us the victory'.  
For us, who by proxy inflicted gross oppression,  
Among whom the humblest have some sins of omission,  
War is not simple: in more or less degree  
All are guilty, though some will suffer unjustly.  
Can we say mass to dedicate our bombs?  
Yet those earlier English, for all their psalms

Were marauders, had less provocation than we,  
And the causes of war were as mixed and hard to see.  
And since of two evils our victory would be the less,  
And coming soon, leave some strength for peace,  
Hopeful like Minot and the rest, we pray:  
'Lord, turn us again, confer on us victory.'

### *At Parting*

Since we through war awhile must part  
Sweetheart, and learn to lose  
Daily use  
Of all that satisfied our heart:  
Lay up those secrets and those powers  
Wherewith you pleased and cherished me these two  
years:

Now we must draw, as plants would,  
On tubers stored in a better season,  
Our honey and heaven;  
Only our love can store such food.  
Is this to make a god of absence?  
A new-born monster to steal our sustenance?

We cannot quite cast out lack and pain.  
Let him remain—what he may devour  
We can well spare:  
He never can tap this, the true vein.  
I have no words to tell you what you were,  
But when you are sad, think, Heaven could give no  
more.

*Before Sleep*

Now that you lie  
In London afar,  
And may sleep longer  
Though lonelier,  
For I shall not wake you  
With a nightmare,  
Heaven plant such peace in us  
As if no parting stretched between us.

The world revolves  
And is evil;  
God's image is  
Wormeaten by the devil;  
May the good angel  
Have no rival  
By our beds, and we lie curled  
At the sound unmoving heart of the world.

In our good nights  
When we were together,  
We made, in that stillness  
Where we loved each other,  
A new being, of both  
Yet above either:  
So, when I cannot share your sleep,  
Into this being, half yours, I creep.

*A Dream Observed*

Out from his bed the breaking seas  
By waking eyes unseen  
Now fall, aquatic creatures whirl  
And he whirls through the ambient green.

The sea lion and the scolopendra  
Lolling in sleep he sees  
Strange in their ways, and the swift changes  
Their landscape makes, from shells to trees.

Down English lanes a camel walks,  
Or untrammelled flies.  
But I, wakeful and watching, see  
How chilly out of the clothes he lies.

Easy an act to cover him warm:  
Such a lover's small success  
Like the heaped mind so humble in sleep  
But points our actual powerlessness.

Monsters in dreams he sees, yet lies  
At peace in his curling bed;  
Blessings that outdo all distress  
Implicit in his sleeping head.

### *Zennor*

Seen from these cliffs the sea circles slowly.  
Ponderous and blue today, with waves furled,  
Slowly it crosses the curved world.  
We wind in its waters with the tide,  
But the pendent ships afar  
Where the lightest blue and low clouds are  
We lose as they hover and over the horizon slide.  
When it was a dark blue heaven with foam like stars  
We saw it lean above us from the shore,  
And over the rocks the waves rear  
Immense, and coming in with crests on fire;  
We could not understand  
Finding the sea so high above the land  
What held its waters from flooding the world entire.



Today it lies in place, and the dun houses,  
The apple-green cloudy oats, the cows that se  
Compact of the yellow crust of their cream,  
Shrink on Amalveor's grey and tawny sides,  
Sucking the last shreds of sun.  
But all life here is carried on  
Against the crash and cry of the moving tides.

### *For a Child Expected*

Lovers whose lifted hands are candles in winter,  
Whose gentle ways like streams in the easy summer  
Lying together  
For secret setting of a child, love what they do,  
Thinking they make that candle immortal, those  
streams forever flow,  
And yet do better than they know.

So the first flutter of a baby felt in the womb,  
Its little signal and promise of riches to come,  
Is taken in its father's name;  
Its life is the body of his love, like his caress,  
First delicate and strange, that daily use  
Makes dearer and priceless.

Our baby was to be the living sign of our joy,  
Restore to each the other's lost infancy;  
To a painter's pillaging eye  
Poet's coiled hearing, add the heart we might earn  
By the help of love; all that our passion would yield  
We put to planning our child.

The world flowed in; whatever we liked we took:  
For its hair, the gold curls of the November oak  
We saw on our walk;

Snowberries that make a Milky Way in the wood  
For its tender hands; calm screen of the frozen flood  
For our care of its childhood.

But the birth of a child is an uncontrollable glory;  
Cat's cradle of hopes will hold no living baby,  
Long though it lay quietly.  
And when our baby stirs and struggles to be born  
It compels humility: what we began  
Is now its own.

*For as the sun that shines through glass  
So Jesus in his Mother was.*  
Therefore every human creature,  
Since it shares in His nature,  
In candle gold passion or white  
Sharp star should show its own way of light.  
May no parental dread or dream  
Darken our darling's early beam:  
May she grow to her right powers  
Unperturbed by passion of ours.

### *For Robin and Kirstie*

Again earth enters the cold tunnel,  
Warm beams barely burnish the air  
Icy and as crisp as silk;  
Only the trees are left on fire:  
And we have lasted a year of war.

The summer that brought disaster and death  
Still brought you safely from the island,  
Left us our lives and the knowledge of love.  
The year is not wholly unkind  
Whose tide-fall leaves such treasure behind.

Now raiders whistle the wind  
Wherever it blows, and make the distance  
Wider between your hills and ours:  
Yet still the fact of your existence  
Is comfort and is confidence.

For I remember the delight I had  
And may have—in your company,  
In many mundane and cheerful things,  
But in music chiefly,  
That is both human and heavenly.

Soon we may learn to fear our beds  
As little as our quieter graves:  
Meanwhile I send to you, dear cousins,  
Thanks and a blessing for your lives,  
And pray God to preserve your loves.

*Extract from "For a Christening"*

Blessing, sleep and grow taller in sleeping.  
Lie ever in kind keeping.  
Infants curl in a cowl of peace  
And should lie lazy. After this ease,  
When the soul out of its safe shell goes,  
Stretched as you stretch those knees and toes,  
What should I wish you? Intelligence first,  
In a credulous age by instruction cursed.  
Take from us both what immunity  
We have from the germ of the printed lie.  
Your father's calm temper I wish you, and  
The shaping power of his confident hand.  
Much, too, that is different and your own;  
And may we learn to leave you alone.  
For your part, forgive us the pain of living,  
Grow in that harsh sun great-hearted and loving.

Sleep, little honey, then ; sleep while the powers  
Of the Nine Bright Shiners and the Seven Stars  
Harmless, encircle: the natural world  
Lifegiving, neutral, unless despoiled  
By our greed or scorn. And wherever you sleep—  
My arms outgrown—or waking weep,  
Life is your lot: you lie in God's hand,  
In His terrible mercy, world without end.

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## LYNETTE ROBERTS

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### *Poem from Llanybri*

IF YOU COME MY WAY THAT IS. . . .  
Between now and then, I will offer you  
A fist full of rock cress fresh from the bank  
The valley tips of garlic red with dew  
Cooler than shallots, a breath you can swank

In the village when you come! At noon-day  
I will offer you a choice bowl of cowl  
Served with a 'lover's' spoon and a chopped spray  
Of leeks or savori fach, not used now

In the old way you'll understand! The din  
Of children singing through the eyelet sheds  
Ringing 'smith hoops, chasing the butt of hens ;  
Or I can offer you Cwmcelyn spread

With quartz stones, from the wild scratchings of men ;  
You will have to go carefully with clogs  
Or thick shoes for it's treacherous the fen,  
The East and West Marshes also have bogs.

Then I'll do the lights, fill the lamp with oil,  
 Get coal from the shed, water from the well;  
 Pluck and draw pigeon with crop of green foil  
 This your good supper from the lime-tree fells.

A sit by the hearth with blue flames rising,  
 No talk. Just a stare at 'Time' gathering  
 Healed thoughts, pool insight, like a swan sailing  
 Peace and sound around the home, offering

You a night's rest and my day's energy.  
 You must come Alun start this pilgrimage,  
 Can you come?—send an ode or elegy  
 In the old way and raise our Heritage.

## *The Circle of C*

*(Written 3rd December, 1940)*

I walk and cinder bats riddle my cloak  
 I walk to Cwmcelyn ask prophets the way.

*There is no way they cried crouched on the hoarstone rock  
 And the Dogs of Annwn roared louder than of late.*

*Red fever will fall with the maytide blossom  
 Fever as red as your cloak. Woe to all men.  
 Food-ties will mellow in the bromide season  
 Then willowed peace may be bought.*

But what of my love I cried  
 As a curlew stabbed the sand;

*And we cut for the answer. They said  
 He would come not as he said he would come  
 But later with sailing ice, war-glass and lame.  
 Grieve not it is better so.*

I left the bay wing-felled and bogged  
Kicked the shale despondent and green

Heard Rosie say lace-curtained in clogs  
I've put a Yule log on your grate.

### *Xaquixaguana*

In the lake of pools  
Where icebergs stand firm on the ground,  
And refrain to move for beauty of their image,  
Five Temples lie wounded in their sides  
Each plundered and more progressive than the last.  
I speak of the one with the grey-cruised sleepers  
Sitting in the splint-blue cave.  
Especially he, of the up-side-down burial  
With arrows set like buhls in the rib of the wreck:  
Who was this white man of Peru?  
And what flat burial did he deserve  
To stir their sandstone agave? To face emerald sky  
And snarling rocks where the sun's tied up?  
Lying stiff among gold filaments and animate clay  
Shouting azreal forms and intricate beads:  
Those huacasspread and exposed under cacti water-beds,  
Green as tunas, and weathered with poisoned alizarin  
    darts  
Who was this man who stole their store of gold?  
Who found down here down Pilcomayo way,  
Near lion grass and glass ships sailing the lakes,  
Who was he, that lies buried at Haravec's feet  
Aggrieved by this ice and basaltic sheet.

*Lamentation*

To the village of lace and stone  
Came strangers. I was one of these  
Always observant and slightly obscure.  
I roamed the hills of bird and bone  
Rescuing bees from under the storm:  
Five hills rocked and four homes fell  
The day I remember the raid so well.  
Eyes shone like cups chipped and stiff  
The living bled, the dead lay in their grief  
Cows, sheep, horses, all had got struck  
Black as bird wounds, red as wild duck.

DEAD as icebone breaking the hedge.  
DEAD as soil failing of good heart.  
DEAD as trees quivering with shock  
At the hot death from the plane.

O the cold loss of cattle  
With their lovely big eyes.  
The emptiness of sheds,  
The rick stacked high.  
The breast of the hills  
Will soon turn grey  
As the dogs that grieve  
And I that fetched them in;  
For the good gates are closed  
In the yard down our way.

(But my loss! my loss is greater  
Than Rosie's of Chapel House Farm  
For I met death before birth:  
Fought for life and in reply lost  
My own with a cold despair.  
I hugged the fire around the hearth

To warm the beat and wing  
Yet knew the symbol when it came  
Lawrence had found the same.  
I THREW THE STARLING HARD AS STONE  
INTO THE BREAKING EARTH. . . .)

DEAD as icebone breaking the hedge.  
DEAD as soil failing of good heart.  
DEAD as trees quivering with shock  
At the hot death from the plane.

O the salt loss of life  
Her lovely green ways.  
The emptiness of crib  
And big stare of night.  
The breast of the hills  
Yield a bucket of milk:  
But the crane no longer cries  
With the round birds at dawn  
For the home has been shadowed  
A storm of sorrow drowned the way.

### *Blood and Scarlet Thorns*

(*adagio*)

WHO—bends the plain to waist of night  
And stems the birds to tree of flight,  
Who stretches leagues to see a bone  
Of bison cast as proud as stone,  
Who lengthens maize and sweeps the light  
Of grenadine right out of sight;  
It is the hard and monstrous plight  
Of weeping birth this citron dawn  
This citron dawn



A heart breaks through the ice of night  
WHO IS—and bursts a paper kite  
That sails the day into a dome  
Of joy, and tears, and monotone,  
This day maintained: a child was born,  
A child was born.

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## MICHAEL ROBERTS

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### *The Castle*

Words fall, words fail, like rocks, like falling stones;  
Out of the towered clouds and the dark air,  
Words fail, and a tree of blackness falls:  
There is nothing at all to surrender or defend.

It was a grim castle, built in the bad years,  
Built by an old man after years of failure,  
Stuccoed with long complacency, and now  
No more than an empty wineskin or a crushed fruit.

From the dark earth, the tree broke out, and men  
Died with a frantic zeal, and spitting death:  
Who knows what it was they died for?  
Their bones are a fine dust, and their names forgotten.

Suburbs creep up the hill, and the trams are running,  
Children find ghostly playmates in the ruins;  
The sun glares on the emptiness, and vanished walls  
Burn with a bitter death and unfulfilled perfection.

Stamp out the memory of old wars and lost causes;  
Build a grave citadel of peace, or a tower of death:  
The castle stands, inhuman, incorruptible,  
Like a film before the eyes, or a mad vision.

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*In Our Time*

Between the rough hills of gabbro and the cold sea,  
Between the factory hooter and the snub-nosed bullet,  
Folly grows up to its full height, but cannot grow for  
ever.

Folly is built on pride, on pride and power,  
And power ends in weariness and duty:  
Even the hooded eagle cannot soar to heaven.

And the leader looks at last toward the people,  
People asking for a home, a plot of earth,  
A pageant in spring, and a sight of foreign merchants.

Power is built on fear and empty bellies:  
Between the rough hills of gabbro and the cold sea  
The gulls scream, squabbling for a poor harvest.

Between the factory hooter and the snub-nosed bullet,  
Under the shadow of the guns, the corn ripens,  
And folly cannot die, but cannot grow for ever.

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*W. R. RODGERS*

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*Summer Holidays*

New every morning now the clerk docks off  
Yesterday's desk-date, jerks back the needle  
On duty's disc, and noses and slides on  
Round the ingrowing ring and exact track  
Of old tactics till the day's contracting  
Circle ends, and suddenly the idle needle.

Skids wildly into zig-zag freedom  
And tidy tailspin, the clerk knocks off  
Abruptly, buttoning-up his coat.

And later, no doubt, you will see him  
Nosing and sliding in orderly line  
Into pin-lighted cinema, being led  
Alertly to allotted seat of ease,  
Relaxing with eyes like asterisks ;  
Or note him standing in stadium rind,  
Eager for joy to be unconfined, the  
Electric hare let loose to recapture  
Its first fine careless rapture.

Even here at the day's convenient halt  
And within its convolvulus ring  
He has his own hugged track, his strangling string  
Of ingrained act, his railed and ready ease ;  
And coiled in this roundabout and tail-chase  
Of private scope and escape is ever  
The spin of flesh on the spindle of bone  
Concentring all, with its brute ambitions,  
Its acute and terrible attritions.

But few look up to see or consider  
This, the slack and screw of their happiness,  
The economic claw, the heart's own flaw,  
The ambient of mixed routine and rout ;  
Few look, except to the standing desk-date  
(their only shoremark) that notes and notches  
Time's indivisibly-flowing miles,  
That recognizes the returning tide,  
That remembers the arriving traveller.

New every morning through a thousand streets  
Life siphons into offices, and worms

Into old workings: yet the entombed man  
Waiting behind the walled weeks hears always  
The deliberate taps of time loudening  
And the rescuing days drawing nearer,  
Till at last rock opens and the gloom  
Breaks like a bomb about him—holiday hands  
Beckon him from far lands, urge his escape.

So out of pent city and inland pit  
They nose and slide by easy rut and rail  
To distant sea-edge, spreading boldly  
On sand-dunes, or lolling on piers  
(the leash-ends of land),  
Or, in pairs, pacing slowly, posing as idlers  
Till the last hill hides  
Them, and they hurry deliberately  
On to the Land's End and hilt's halt of heart's desire.

Longing to skip over the edge of scope  
They look out all day at the far islands,  
Or scan with glass the slipping distances  
To where, bold in some enormous valley,  
Walled and bottomed by the swinging water,  
The cormorant squats: or between tide-lines  
They march for miles searching for shells, leaping  
Back when the swan-neck wave pours down and  
pounds  
Out to yellow hissing beaks at their feet.

Here in these strange places no memory  
Arrests and edits the running reel  
Of their eager extravagant acts, fear  
Lays no detaining or determining hand  
On them, the backward light of precedent  
No longer faces them with dutiful shadows  
—Frolicking lives that at a finger's touch

Will curl like worms into a stiff conceit  
And dead front of frightened consciousness.

Along the valley roads some roll in cars,  
Looking for life on sky-lines, or in bars,  
Mustered in bus on mystery trip they cheer  
As the chartered miles gape before them  
And zip obediently behind them,  
Their fixed stare clattering like a stick  
Across the sliding face and fence of fields  
To the full stop, where they interrogate  
The great man's birthplace, or the rebel's grave.

Through bright gaps these sudden strangers snapshot  
The slipshod landscape, and depart content.  
But, coming home in the bare evening,  
Memory on the mind's horizon edge  
Like lightning prickles and flashes, and Carc  
Like caterpillar in curled leaf shrinks the heart;  
For still the thread and threat of memory  
Runs through these strange places and faces and  
Jerks back the jumping beads of time and space.

And still from frugal bungalow and fig-leaf tent  
The stockbroker, the stonebreaker, and the candle-  
stick-maker

Trot into shop for morning newspaper,  
Afraid to let the world go by without  
Accommodating eye, anxious to acquaint  
And equate their happiness with all  
Unbalancing happenings, helplessly  
Eager to follow the involving game  
Of territorial noughts and crosses.

And still each night from alp and valley lap,  
From all dividing individual aims

Life spokes into the town's sociable hub ;  
Where, under confetti-freckle of lights,  
The girls in banana-bright bandanas  
Parade down prickly lanes and lines of eyes ;  
Others round fun-stand wait the rocket-flash  
Of wit on upturned faces, or applaud  
The seal-like vocalist balancing one last note on voice-  
tip.

Far out on the wavering water they see  
The pointed ship probe on to express end,  
While they freely to-night at the slack edge  
Of the vehement sea of affairs sit  
And saunter ; soon all must enter  
That stiff and teeming centre, to-morrow  
Each homing heart released by time-table  
Springs dove-like back to office ark and task, gives  
One last elastic look and snaps away.

Away from outer rout to inner rut  
And ironed route ; away from the wild  
And unwall'd waste of wish, the zig-zag tracks,  
The wilful freaks and fractures of habit,  
The staccato acts of insurrection,  
The guilty bed, the naked bathe, the night  
Annexed from niggard eyes by drunkenness,  
The lonely climb at dawn, all the jerky  
Gap-toothed gamut of places and spaces.

Away from these eccentric ends to the city's  
Centripetal calm and planetary core  
Of custom and corporate act, away  
To private lawns and privet lanes  
With pilot curbs and polite drains,  
Day's slick pay-lines, night's slack play-pens  
Where we are ticketed and trickled into

Stalls, and turnstiled into galleries and grades  
And apt groups, like pebbles that elbow and  
Rub shiny shoulders on a narrow beach.

—Thus on the round and turning stage of flesh  
We present to you the usual act,  
Rut and Rout, alias Butt and Rebut,  
Alias Leash and Release, the magpie pair  
In their bitter backbiting ball-bouncing  
And reciprocating patter. No doubt  
You have seen it before, for it is  
The same yesterday, to-day and forever,  
Showing at all houses and theatres,  
The skeleton of all our furbished plays.

For not by gradual stealthy steps do we  
Move onwards to a plotted destiny,  
But between antinomies we are stretched  
And pent, and catapulted to new ends  
And angry issues. Note, now, how in us  
Each thing resists and buoys its opposite,  
Goodness is foreskinned and frisked by Evil,  
And Violence advances Reason's forces,  
Cruelty recruits Kindness, and titan  
Dictators tickle tom-tit democrats.

And Faith beats down the enemy's last gate,  
But listless then within resistless halls  
Dies of its enemy's death: thus do you see  
The saw-toothed graph drawn daily, inking  
The in-and-out of action, linking rut and rout;  
But few look up to know, few seek to master  
These see-saw forces until disaster  
Breaks the pithless sticks of apathy, and then  
Through gaps of anger heady droves will hurry  
And into panic-traps hot hooves will huddle.

And what will be left of us then but our faces  
In albums, our names on war's memorials,  
Our number on old disc picked up by peasant?  
History's putty shapes, pitied or praised  
According to public mode or private mood,  
We have done it ourselves and need expect  
No less, for the music goes round and round  
In the old rings, new every morning,  
The spin of flesh on the spindle of bone  
Concentring all, with its brute ambitions,  
Its acute and terrible attritions.

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## ALAN ROOK

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### *The Retreat*

Faint now behind the secret eyes of these  
The sleepers, the dreamers, the exact and delicate  
Flowering of our age, dusk steals. And over

The trees and rivers, over the golden meadows and  
vines the glow  
Of death is spreading. I one with them  
Feel the pulse stir strangely. Now

Evening introduces her sudden crisis  
Of vermillion and shadows. Silence falls  
Over the cultivated secrecy of these faces.

I too with these have suffered. I too have felt  
The richness pass and the inexplicable beauty  
Of memory fading—lost in the present. Defeat,



Humiliation, and the dreaded tremendous excitement  
Of movement and change were ours, in our blood, our  
fever.

Not alone in the aeroplane or the shell, not confined

To the trickery and lies, the treacherous bullet. No,  
But even in fellowship, the touch of hand, in the quiet  
Word, in the eye of a daisy or the timelessness of trees  
Lies fear. Death haunts the flowers and cities.

So now, leaning against my gun, in these fields and  
Plains of Belgium, conscious of the warp and fret  
Of spring on the hedges and forests, I accept! I accept!

For there lies all our power; the power of the young  
and the lonely.

I know that the past is lies, and the present only  
Important. I see in life service, and in dying an end

Of loving. I know that the evil in our nature  
Is our fear of history, our incapacity to suffer,  
And our poor cold dread of the crises of the future.

The sun bows. And now the earth, the mother,  
Is cold. The patient suffering of these my friends, their  
Lucid sorrow, is my burden and my song.

### *Poem near Bethune*

O rain that turns the shoddy streets of  
summer, and the avenues of experience  
to a mirror of our late desire,  
and images the year's betrayal,

Fall now on this uncovered dream, and  
let your rivulets reflect

some hope of purpose in our  
death. For all our wishing

Cannot deflect the course of this mad  
season, nor control the rush  
of strangers to the gate, nor turn  
the wounded from the hospitals of thought.

This year with a suddenness altogether  
surprising, our weaning and coming-of-age  
celebrations coincided. Now  
the estate is ours ; the litigations

Of autumn, and winter's jurists cannot  
deny us. Whether we like it or not,  
and most of us don't, the casual  
fruition, the indifferent phrase

And gesture of the ugly, the long-neglected  
vision of love which created only  
a wider loneliness, all  
in perpetuity ours.

Who now shall bid the soldier return to  
his pastures ; who tune his love to the music  
of the cicada, or lighten the burden  
of the child sleeping on the doorstep

In the sun ? Who, in this summer season,  
shall bid our memories search our childhood  
for that lost dream, with all  
its fascinating lack of detail,

And individual surprises, where Moses  
was a lion, and the swine were continually rushing  
with most joyous abandon  
for our delight into the sea ?

Dare we tell the policeman, walking  
with Ella in the square, down past the grocer's  
that his loins are already engaged  
to the Inconsistent, that fatherhood

Is on him before his time? Not even  
war, which turns from the contemplation  
of unreality, to something  
his mind can grasp, can unite

His lonely overtures to passion with  
the inescapable journey through  
the highways of love and history.  
For what is lost to this

Generation is the passionate withdrawal,  
the consistent retreat to the desert, and what  
has come is the participation  
in the involuntary event.

For what to the living is music, except  
sensation of sorrow: what to the swift  
is thought, a rose in the desert:  
what, when creation turns

To bite the hand that cherishes, is a rose?  
O lonely and feeble the still insistent  
urge to unite these present  
unrealities to future

Contemplation of expected events. Must death  
the transformer, the migrant, the lonely sorrow,  
lend to the carpenter  
the craftsman's sedulous cunning?

Must the productive power of the human  
function turn to the contemplation

of a few dry bones and a handful  
of temporary, vain regrets?

Must the narcissus ideal of society  
founded on the rose, and the summer idyll,  
lost now, alas, of a new  
and fertile desert, where joy

Is not a toy we snatch in the shadows  
of the park, or between six and ten behind  
a pub's closed doors,  
but a vision so real that almost

You could squeeze it, so near that almost  
the heart stops in expectation of desire—  
must this now turn to lonely  
irrevocable ecstasy?

No! there can be to the vanquished no wish  
for surrender, for the landed fish no hope  
of another spawning. The heart  
that is failing knows that its days

Of participation are over. Then let us  
gladly, with the resolute courage of the broken,  
not fondly, not idly, embrace  
our future decision. For those

That erect this barrier to barbarism, found  
a new Athens on the ashes of St. Paul's,  
can live not, nor hope to see  
the columns of the Acropolis; only

The ruins of their generation, and lovely the  
heavens at nightfall, and final the thunder.  
Accept the accident of our time,  
a modern, scientific miracle.

*Dunkirk Pier*

Deeply across the waves of our darkness fear  
like the silent octopus feeling, groping, clear  
as a star's reflection, nervous and cold as a bird,  
tells us that pain, tells us that death is near.

Why should a woman telling above her fire  
incantations of evening, thoughts that are  
older and paler than history, why should this lark  
exploring extinction and oneness of self and air

remind us that, lonely and lost as flowers in deserted  
weed-mastered gardens, each faint face averted  
from the inescapable confusion, for each of us slowly  
death on his last, most hideous journey has started?

What was our sin?—that heartless to the end  
falls now the heavy sickle on foe, on friend,  
and those that we love, value and regret.  
surrender quickest to death's empty hand.

Failure to suffer? We who in years past  
have suffered, yes, in this or that, but in the last  
Irrevocable act of suffering, as a dog suffers deeply,  
blindly, completely, are not versed.

What hope for the future? Can we who see the tide  
ebbing along the shore, the greedy, lined  
with shadows, dare with puny words support  
a future which belongs to others? Dare we bind

now, at this last moment of sunshine above  
the crests of oncoming events, like waves which move  
remorselessly nearer, future generations  
with sacrifice? *We* who taught hate, expect them to  
love?

*London, 1940*

Lonely now this unreal city of  
desperate hopes and slow insidious  
will to continue living, and broken the pavement  
where our young desires went courting.

Low and determined the voices, like rain  
on the splintered window, heavy as these  
iron shutters the faces of those seeking  
an end to the chain, the vision.

For those the strong, the powerful, not  
realizing as yet their power, and also  
for these, the impotent, let mastery be given  
and the will to act, that out

of this, the Indescribable, treading  
the path of promises, hope shall fuse,  
resolve spring as ears to reaper, sharper  
than this, fertile as those.

*For Christopher*

Flowering the trees and the soft voices of spring  
caress these fields and faces. Forgotten shadows  
like the mummy's faded hand, the  
gesture of history, new harbourage have found.

A place in the sun, a leaf they can call their own,  
filled with terrific promise of the flower—  
the flower, the future, the longed-for—  
For even the old retain their dreams.

Even the tired are elated. In spring. In the promise  
of that which the eye discerns like smoke on the  
horizon.

Lost, lost in the present  
into the future our thoughts are returning.

Then was the past, the chain. Then the polemic  
discussion. Then the academic teaparty to tune  
of bombers. Then the long and  
marvellous tale slowly unfurling.

But turning your gentle eyes surprised to mine  
with the frank grace which is forever you,  
you in your wisdom leading  
there where the heart's forever moving.

And into these golden lawns and trees the sap  
headlong is rushing. The dangerous quiet dream  
of the past has left the mind  
and tired eyes regain their lustre.

Wonder, like an axe across the roots and branches  
rendering untenable the loveless, halts and turns  
from the cool complexity of thought  
and desire northward and westward turning.

The trees impassioned raise the sky with their faces,  
a primrose holds the universe encircled  
and laughter like anemones  
flashes and flickers through these oaks.

For now in this sunshine the adventurous spirit leaps  
from the old slough of history, snakelike at last  
casts off the winter loves  
and realizes its innate destiny.

I see. I accept. In these three, in love, the long  
dream of beauty to be held and treasured,

and the wise relevant  
fulfilment of the individual promise

is freedom. So when the leaves fall and over  
these flowered fields old winter rests her finger  
to these knowing another  
summer at hand my strength, my song.

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## D. S. SAVAGE

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### *February*

Ebbs from soiled fields the last drab vestige of snow,  
Through February's veils the hazy distance looms.  
In sunken woods no melancholy horn is blown,  
Only an invisible process of decay consumes.

I have sat at this window and watched the day  
Consumed, as though its substance were a powdering  
    wood  
In whose grey embers the origin of all decay  
Smouldered, as it patiently smoulders within my blood.

Rotting vegetation, a leaf like a leather glove,  
A glove or a fleshless hand, of a corpse or a tree;  
Excrement; a dead dog buried in a garden grave;  
I am all these, and all these moulder in me.

I am the limestone in the cave, the putrefying bone,  
The seashell mashed and splintered by the mechanical  
    surf,  
The green, soft fallen tree-trunk, the crumbling stone,  
The waterlogged carrion under the thatch of turf.



The odour of mortality rises from the death of the day,  
Earth's subtle chemistry proceeds; water drips from  
    the boughs;  
Nourished on black corruption, warmed in the breath  
    of decay  
The seeds of Spring lie swelling in their soaking house.

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## FRANCIS SCARFE

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### *Sunday Leave*

I stand in the roadway dressed in the drab of war,  
Red hands, red face, battledress, cropped hair,  
Carried away by this intricate fugue of roses;

Beyond the bleeding hawthorn the red and orange,  
Scarlet and purple, pink and vermillion,  
Cream and heliotrope roses with most pure ermine.

I am ashamed of my utter nothingness,  
To be less than a man with nothing to do or show,  
Who move no soul as mine moves to these flowers,

And am aware that the colour of my life,  
Now I am learning death, is not so pure  
As this pattern of blossoms by a cottage door.

But though I shall never win that pureness lost,  
I share the grace of these flowers to see them bloom,  
And feel, wherever a rose grows, there is home.

*Icarus: Poem for an Aviator*

Step straight and clean from your shade as the bombs  
are dropping  
On London and Berlin their crocodile tears ;  
Rise like a tree and tower from your dreary childhood  
With the strength of an ox in the drive of your  
hovering love.  
Your past lies dead and the soaring devil's delivered  
As your heart explodes like a meteor, making you live  
With the endless rhythm of Sisypheus rolling his rock  
With the joy of an eagle plunging his beak in a plover,  
With the ease of a master-key noiselessly turned in a  
lock.

Over the lanes where the ragged urchins are playing,  
Flying and blessing, your self exults and is saved,  
Who crawled through your boyhood, blind in a slum of  
darkness,  
With oaths in your ears and an aching stone in your  
breast.  
You were afraid of your life and your quivering body,  
Afraid of the kiss and the fiery cross in your bowels,  
Afraid of the rusting wonder, the sexual thrust,  
Your father's hand and your mother's whitening hair,  
And the slime of the worm as it scrawled your name in  
the dust.

All these, young man, were the images of your fear.

Until you rose in the image of your God,  
Crashing through clouds and spreading your hands  
through the azure,  
Grasping the rainbows and spitting your hate on the  
earth,  
You flew with the falcon, you split the soft sky like a  
birth.

Clenching the joystick you scribbled your pride on the  
    heavens,  
Releasing beneath you the diving symbols of death.  
Climb, Icarus, higher: the Sun will stand stiller to meet  
    you,  
The world turn its shoulder, the Moon give a friendlier  
    stare:  
It is only your courage can break your wild heart and  
    break you:  
Step clean from your shadow, be lost in the bleeding  
    air.

### *Parachutists*

Plummets from sky sway the beautiful dancers  
Touching no land but the gold of the morning,  
Opens behind them the blossoming silken  
Bloom like a garland a delicate warning

Sliding and gliding like spirits from heaven  
Slung from the stars, they draw patterns on silence,  
With balance of ballet but swiftly as bullets  
They pilot their plunge from the blue into Devon

Whirling from nowhere, to Africa, Russia,  
Dancing through clouds to the wild heart of England.  
Light as death's angels they march through the azure  
Drifting through space like the Earth's bright pollen

Stealers of beauty, they curl round the eagle  
Wrestlers with lightning they open in crosses:  
These are the bravest, who soar without equal  
But never shall rival the heights of my wishes.

Beings less free than my hopes, they come falling  
Dwindling, proud dancers, to death and to danger,  
For over the headlands the watchers are calling  
And the king of the air is marked down as a stranger

And you are less free than my love for the people,  
Those who are waiting, amazed at your coming,  
The solid, the silent, the simple, the subtle.  
Who are rooted in earth like my love and my longing.

### *Barcarolle*

My love, my love, fair was the river  
At noon in the high reaches,  
Where the rills dropped through the clover  
Over pebbles bright as peaches

On each side the elms the horses  
Under us the frogs and fishes  
And the west wind cutting losses  
Ran as fast as lover's wishes

Over all the sun was shining  
Heightening smiles upon our faces  
Till the shadows started climbing  
Stealing all the country graces

Came the town the sirens hooting  
Clouds of fire across the river  
Marked the centre of the shooting  
Marked our homes ablaze forever

Dark the ships above us glowered  
While the scarlet tide was turning  
Blood and bullets round us showered  
Sparks and splinters from the burning

Factories where imprisoned workmen  
Weaponless were killed like cattle  
While along the quays their children  
Ran in terror from the battle

My love my love foul was the river  
When night fell between the piers  
When blood and gall ran with the water  
And the sky dropped inhuman tears.

### *Ballad of the Safe Area*

A little reading and a little loving  
A little eating and a little sleeping  
The days went over me half happy  
With friends and books and cups of coffee

I watched the trees wave in green gardens  
Avoided the police and the air raid wardens  
I was delighted when the roses  
Showed, like pups, their soft pink noses

Enjoyed the quiet and garrulous evenings  
The rhythm of my child's deep breathing  
As smoke and faces wove warm patterns  
Of home not easily forgotten

I thought of poets lost in barracks  
Or crawling about on muddy stomachs  
And drank their toasts in beer and whisky  
Drank now to Stalin, now to Trotsky

Now to Chamberlain or Churchill  
—In fact I wished nobody ill  
But loved myself and forgave the devil  
And tried, for a time, to live on the level

Lectured each morning to pale students  
Taught them intriguing rudiments  
Of revolution and laissez-faire  
And above all, how to be debonair

So far, so good: the Spring was springing  
Through purple heather to brown hills clinging  
When over the city the planes came flying  
And out I ran with the fear of dying

All night we stood out on the terrace  
Watching the glow grow to a furnace  
Bombs and shells and whirls of shrapnel  
Laid us often on the gravel

Then in the middle of the bombardment  
When the whole street was making friends  
A landmine fell at the nearest corner  
And I thought for a minute I was a gonner

Glass flowed like water from all the windows  
Black smoke came rushing out in billows  
A hundred doors leaped off their hinges  
And I said goodbye to books and binges

Then a second landmine dropped just near  
At the back of the house where lay my dear  
But it didn't explode and I laughed and cried  
And cursed as I pulled the family outside

Then along to the bridge where the flats were burning  
I didn't look twice but improved my running  
With the kid in my arms and the people crying  
Past where the dead lay with the dying

But there was nothing for me to do  
The wardens don't like you to be a hero  
So they pushed me back from the blazing fire  
And made me fall over some copper wire

Which made me feel rather a fool.  
We all passed the night in a draughty school  
And all caught colds, and that is why  
Tears are still floating in my eye.

1941.

### *Night Fishing*

Lightbuoys bob red on the sea  
Through blue fog. Bell-stick tugs in the sand  
Till taut line slipped through a cunning hand  
Heaves a whiting to the bay.

Arm arcs, swings a whistling line  
Dwindling the coil till the plunger's splash  
Spurts spray like blood in the lighthouse flash  
At the lip of the green Tyne.

Salt north-easter peels the beach,  
Plaits flaxen tracery as it combs  
Dunes to long tresses. Curlew cries come  
Craven from the sheer cliff ledge.

Moon gilds weeds on the split rock  
Where once I sat in the wishing-chair  
And yearned, Kathleen, for your golden hair:  
Thoughts drift, and are lost, like wrack.

1941.

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TOM SCOTT

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*Sea-dirge*

I found him drowned on the rock that night  
And the wind high ; moonlight it was  
And the hungry sucking of the sea  
At my feet, stretching away in front of me ;  
Never a lover was laid on the braes that night  
Nor any living soul I'm thinking, unless they were mad  
And drawn to the moon ; I found him there  
In the rocks that night and the wind was high ;  
Bare he was as the sea and the rock on either side,  
With a rag of silk in his hand  
And sand in his nose ; moonlight it was  
And the sea before me ; my hair dragged at my eyes,  
I couldn't see, but a hand of ice was plunged  
Deep in my womb ; I found him lying  
Drowned on the rock that night and  
The wind was high ; moonlight it was  
And the sea sucked at my feet ;  
Then I heard from the cave behind  
The skirl of the piper who died on rocks  
The wail of the pipes and then the cry of his soul ,  
I upped and screamed at the wind and the sea,  
I stripped my forsaken breasts to the moon  
And I kissed the frost of his mouth and the sand ;  
I found him drowned on the rock that night  
And the wind high ; moonlight it was  
And the hungry sucking of the sea  
At my feet and his clammy head in my breasts  
That were bare as the rock and the sea and the sand.



*Poem in Time of Search**(For G. S. Fraser)*

The bomber drones over my shoulder  
On the hill's top, and I welcome it.  
For out there across the sky the moon  
And Time and Space unite  
In the image of Infinity; I fear  
And fearing, love and revere.

The glorious cloud redolent of death  
Edges towards me like my fate  
And below me the town like a lake  
Enwrapped with mist, dies;  
I am torn by the Earth and Sky  
And the wind and the world in a hollow bone are me.

See how this stone table  
Draws my length to its level,  
That the crouching eyes forget men  
Their poverty, reproaches and governing,  
To know the alive and tongueless truth  
Of the secret trees and lesson of the alone and weeping cloud.

I have ignored, O God, too long  
The everlasting secrets binding the stars,  
Earth, and the sun, womb and tomb,  
And you and me, you simple inscrutable monster:  
Man gives nothing but this conflict  
Which I accept; but what are you hiding,  
oceanic hills?

Let me believe! Too long have I doubted,  
Everything doubted, the flare in my gut with a girl:

Let me believe! Give me the message,  
You arrogant stones, and show me the rock  
Beneath Europe's maelstrom; ring me, Time!  
Toll me the deep remoteness, sky centre, and turn me  
then on men.

Give me my gift, and my shift of canvas,  
Set my staff in my hand  
And point me over the tumble to my goal.  
Make me alone and give me midnight  
To be my nucleus as I near the sun;  
And give me the sinews of Earth.

### *Poem in Three Movements*

#### I

Thunder of erd, distant underneath, around us  
The darkness, apprehensive, and over the angry  
Bleak forests, armies of storm gathering  
Breaks, tearing dense drenched apprehensive branches  
With hurricanes, and leaves from an open door;  
Here mountain tarn wildly heaves in stormthunder  
Its lashed, harassed waves within bleak confines  
Till suddenly from cloud-rift sullenly drifting  
Light, pearl-hued shines on woman's fluid, detached,  
Moon-tormented face, solitary in mist like pools  
Dawn-shown, not even shoulders, face only, fugitive  
Mask only, echoing enraged pathetic winds, waves,  
Harassed and sullen, each mood faithfully (almost)  
Caught, cradled in yellow-white fawn moonfingers  
Moving solitary through candle shades, pearl-hued  
Ultimate black, her face moving, light-mellow  
Beautiful in moods, moon-tormented, her woman's  
Fluid of shadow medal, shows falling like waterfalls,

Crystals, splinters of liquid-glass, pathetic, sullen,  
A melody of broken veils over against in silent loans  
Storm-frustration in agony of faith, of moon, is  
Doused now, blinded  
Fury-broken, hell-tossed in hail  
Whirlwind and agony wheels barques, trees,  
See, mountains! how now even ultimate  
Earth cracks black-bright and under us  
Thunderous, how black bells toll atlantics,  
Worldeaters, terrorized, how striped and barred to  
Sky with God's spout-pillars and rods  
Now over us are and stars  
Broke-loosé, flawcht-firestampeded  
Before floods-oil wrath-oceans  
Tolls anger, fury, loveseyes, hair, tombs, lips; tears.

## II

Green, cuckoo-dreaming; muted organs  
Of vaguesummer dawn, delighting heavens  
Pre-birth; high fluted, all yellow tones  
Gowan humble float, drifts with mobile  
Grace of girls, murmur of undiscovered  
Seas, undrumlied waters of light, shell,  
Pearl-hued fluid face, fear-angelic  
Now; now crystallized of heart-assurance  
Leaf-descending face, fawn enshrouded  
In mere atmosphere's veils, candleshade  
Shows wings moon-shadowed in seashell dawn  
Forgiving still if remembering  
Remembering corn green and cream grain,  
Lazy-grasses dawn-shown and tired burns  
Wimpling and mullering in valleys  
Indistinct in church-air, face-a-float,  
Fireflawcht muse, mirroring in musty  
Half lights, dust and old stained glass, nothingness-silent.

## III

Roll, rock-sidling ocean-fields  
Swirl and swing of tragic waves  
Searching a million of miles  
Restlessly, for lost wonders,  
Trundling, treading god-silenced  
Atlantis' forlorn acres;  
Waves here part, swathes of flowers  
Where beautiful that flood-face  
Floats, wrung fawn from heartbroke seas;  
Eyewells sadly disturbing  
Upturned, remote passages  
Of time and world's wandering  
No ice relates, retails no  
Love, but wounds with petal and  
Stem the air with colour, smells  
Sea-pink (wreaths), tears her breasts weep  
Where quicksilvershards-  
like, elver-choirs play;  
Is suddenly like child drowning gone  
While furious water-miles blot the sun;  
Dark blood swells from the earth and heaven  
Files madchariots of winds, clash, hurtle,  
Blackness over us is, shark-teeth bolts  
Shot, sealoud thunder of rock, mountain,  
Uttermost rock tarn to, air strained is;  
Where once was whitedeep with stars, chasm and  
Mountain clash, clash cavern and abyss;  
Now in a whirl of things torn loose, Matterhorn  
And the Andes uprooted heel over, earth  
Showers like blossoms lilac-shed, not falling  
People, drifting moon pale in a sea of winds;  
Here again her face, tormented, smiling and  
Melted with tears, here silence silencing with

Mighty sweep, thunders; till love lightning-struck-  
tamed

A calm light, mellow aflame,

Reveals the shape of nothing,

Patterns of oblivion, sweet

Ululation of all ends

Ends snake ends fish, hands spider ends, ends flowers,  
shells end,

Ends bells ends cloud, all ends sea ends shore ends,  
ends stars, brings

Suns, brings pride of whitewinds endlessly, glory bright  
tears.

April, '41.

### *Canteen*

This boy dressed in dungarees draws my attention;

He stands alone in this smoke and haze

The air of a tropical A.F.N. and Army canteen

Among snappy white-khaki-clad soldiers

And over the counter the white-dressed white actresses;

He stands alone, his dungarees dirty

His old blue shirt stained with grease from some ship;

And I wonder why, browsing in the latest books

Seeking the Pimpernel unity on button-bright tunic

Suddenly this towsy-haired boy disturbs me;

Not that I want to be again in dungarees;

True to my time I am too proud (too afraid) for that;

Nor is it some fashionable flame; but still, coldly

Distantly I watch him alone among the bright uniforms;

I find his presence, like forgotten words,

a bit puzzling.

West Africa, 1941.

*Beneath this Tree bearing Hope in  
its Branches*

Beneath this tree bearing hope in its branches  
Like birds, the loch mirror breaks  
To the salmon's push; the coils of sea-snakes  
Nurse the wound not all this colour stanches.

My mother and lover call from their grave of weeds  
Forsaken spectres staring the wall of tears  
Through, but I shall not again go eddying down those  
    years  
Of loch and star; I kneel among these rainbow-misted  
    reeds,

Listening to the harp of stone that grants  
No rest for this forsaken pile and no return;  
No release shall be my lot and never urn  
Of angel spill to bless my plants.

No, my lover, I shall not again go down  
To linger in your depths, the bugles call in vain;  
My time has crossed the times of those ones slain  
Whom this tree hides; their ache of eyes forbids me  
    drown.

No, my seven swans, I shall go down no more  
To seek the serpents in their beds;  
This green and saintly tree I climb sheds  
From its grain an asp of tears from all before.

I crumble it to dust within my hand,  
The tree of dawn and disappointment; down to death  
I bring it branch and bole, dispel it with breath;  
And all alone along my shores I stand.

## GEORGE SCURFIELD

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### *Five Foxes and the Jovial Huntsman*

This is the end  
cried the jovial huntsman,  
cracking his whip,  
and calling to his brothers:

‘Now we go down the slope together,  
In particularly nasty weather,  
Now we go down the slope together,  
This is the end, this is the end.’

Four foxes sitting underground  
held a consultation  
about this most revealing statement  
which affected all their lives.

A fifth came up  
behind them while they talked  
and gave them his advice:

‘Now is the time to come into the open,  
Fling wide the doors,  
Don’t ask for applause,  
Don’t copy the ants,  
But dance, dance, dance  
Your way out of doors!’

But the four were deaf  
or pretended to be  
and this was their reply:

‘He wants us four foxes  
Sitting on a fence underground

To come out of doors and sit on boxes  
And give ourselves away.  
But after all he is a fox  
And a fox  
Has a tail  
(Called a brush  
By the upper crush)  
And hence he would be quite unable  
To sit upon a table,  
Let alone a box—  
When all is said and done,  
He will always be a fox.'

This is bad,  
Said the fifth to himself,  
And he went away, feeling sad  
and mad  
with the other foxes  
for the way they had misunderstood him.

I was much mistaken  
cried the jovial huntsman,  
cracking his whip  
and calling to his brothers:  
    'Now we go up the slope together,  
    In remarkably decent weather,  
    Now we go up the slope together,  
    I was temporarily misled!'



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## STEPHEN SPENDER

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### *To Poets and Airmen*

Thinkers and airmen—all such  
Friends and pilots upon the edge  
Of the skies of the future—much  
You require a bullet's eye of courage  
To fly through this age.

The paper brows are winged and helmeted,  
The blind ankles bound to a white road,  
Which streams into a night of lead  
Where cities explode.  
Fates unload.

Hatred burning, in small parcels,  
Outrage against social lies,  
Hearts breaking against stone refusals  
Of men to show small mercies  
To men. Now death replies  
Releasing new, familiar devils.

And yet, before you throw away your childhood  
With the lambs pasturing in flaxen hair,  
To plunge into this iron war,  
Remember for a flash the wild good  
Drunkenness where  
You abandoned future care.

And then forget. Become what  
Things require. The expletive word.  
The all-night-long screeching metal bird.  
And all of time shut down in one shot  
Of night by a gun uttered.

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For the joy that was is hidden under grass  
Shadows of hawks flicker over.  
Buried in cellars is laughter that once was  
Which the pick and shovel endeavour  
Vainly to uncover;  
Like a child buried when the raiders pass.

With axe and shovel men hunt among the bricks,  
With lamps and water, for their soul  
Of lilac in the city square; they hack with picks  
Amongst the ruins for their love's goal,  
As though a smile frozen at the North Pole  
Might take pity on their tricks.

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## JULIAN SYMONS

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### *Pub*

The glasses are raised, the voices drift into laughter,  
The clock hands have stopped, the beer in the hands of  
the soldiers  
Is blond, the faces are calm and the fingers can feel  
The wet touch of glasses, the glasses print rings on the  
table,  
The smoke rings curl and go up and dissolve near the  
ceiling,  
This moment exists and is real.

What is reality? Do not ask that. At this moment  
Look at the butterfly eyes of the girls, watch the bar-  
maid's  
Precision in pouring a Scotch, and remember this day,  
This day at this moment you were no longer an island,

People were friendly, the clock in the hands of the  
soldiers

For this moment had nothing to say.

And nothing to say and the glasses are raised, we are  
happy

Drinking through time, and a world that is gentle and  
helpless

Survives in the pub and goes up the smoke of your  
breath,

The regulars doze in the corner, the talkers are fluent;  
Look now in the faces of those you love and remember  
That you are not thinking of death.

But thinking of death as the lights go out and the glasses  
Are lowered, the people go out and the evening  
Goes out ah goes out like a light and leaves you alone,  
As the heart goes out, the door opens out into darkness,  
The foot takes a step, and the moment, the moment of  
falling

Is here, you go down like a stone,

Are you able to meet the disaster, able to meet the  
Cold air of the street and the touch of corruption, the  
rotting

Fingers that murder your own in the grip of love?

Can you bear to find hateful the faces you once thought  
were lovely,

Can you bear to find comfort alone in the evil and  
stunted,

Can you bear to abandon the dove?

The houses are shut and the people go home, we are  
left in

Our islands of pain, the clocks start to move and the  
powerful

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To act, there is nothing now, nothing at all  
To be done: for the trouble is real: and the verdict is  
    final  
Against us. The clocks go round faster and faster. And  
    fast as confetti  
The days are beginning to fall.

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## DYLAN THOMAS

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### *Deaths and Entrances*

On almost the incendiary eve  
    Of several near deaths,  
When one at the least of your best loved  
    And always known must leave  
Lions and fires of his flying breath,  
    Of your immortal friends  
Who'd raise the organs of the counted dust  
    To shoot and sing your praise,  
One who called deepest down shall hold his peace  
    That cannot sink or cease  
    Endlessly to his wound  
In many married London's estranging grief.

On almost the incendiary eve  
    When at your lips and keys,  
Locking, unlocking, the murdered strangers weave,  
    One who is most unknown,  
Your polestar neighbour, sun of another street,  
    Will dive up to his tears.  
He'll bathe his raining blood in the male sea  
    Who strode for your own dead

And wind his globe out of your water thread  
And load the throats of shells  
With every cry since light  
Flashed first across his thunderclapping eyes.

On almost the incendiary eve  
Of deaths and entrances,  
When near and strange wounded on London's waves  
Have sought your single grave,  
One enemy, of many, who knows well  
Your heart is luminous  
In the watched dark, quivering through locks and  
caves,  
Will pull the thunderbolts  
To shut the sun, plunge, mount your darkened keys  
And sear just riders back,  
Until that one loved least  
Looms the last Samson of your zodiac.

### *On a Wedding Anniversary*

At last, in a wrong rain,  
The cold, original voices of the air  
Cry, burning, into the crowd,  
And the hermit, imagined music sings  
Unheard through the street of the flares;

The told birds fly again  
From every true or crater-carrying cloud  
Riding the risk of the night,  
And every starfall question with their wings,  
Whether it be death or light;

The sky is torn across  
This ragged anniversary of two

Who moved for three years in tune  
Through the singing wards of the marriage house  
And the long walks of their vows.

Now their love lies a loss  
And Love and his patients roar on a chain;  
The sun's brought down with a shout.  
Three years dive headlong, and the mice run out  
To see the raiding moon.

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## TERENCE TILLER

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### *The Singers*

I heard them singing in the shadow of sand  
how years grew brittle as bread between our fingers,  
and the immeasurable miles our garland.  
They spoke to the lute with their five-tongued hands,  
and I believed the singers.

First March ran over the lawns in gold and silver;  
and the wheel shook, and it was May; then  
every hour danced on a dulcimer  
on citadels of air. After summer  
came the thunder of wrath of men,

and days were poison into a clear glass,  
coiling from the sky; love was power and terror.  
And the heart knew them, tightened like a windlass,  
dredging the horrible from unseen places  
behind cloaks and mirrors.

Bent as a face watched in a water-bubble,  
the sick year stood round us wearing ghosts;

the ghosts called our thought in the voice of bell:  
could we remember March and not tremble?  
the singers, undistressed?

I hear them singing, now in flame's shadow,  
singing oh lies, lies: now they say  
all is forgotten, was very long ago,  
the garland was bright ashes, the bread mildew;  
and all, faded away.

### *The Grecian Tulip and the Gothic Rose*

The grecian tulip and the gothic rose  
flower to deceive us; limbs age with fruits;  
the man who marks the boneyard with a cross  
reaps poppies; human flesh plucks down the roots  
of the barley. The greyhound with the kind  
sensitive head and the soft eyes, goes blind  
or mad; dies. The wind means all it cries.  
Love, it is time we listened to that wind.  
Who cranes an arm to wait for the white body,  
death, polishing old philosophies,  
gives the grave scarves woven of our beauty.  
Beasts are passive as growing rings of trees;  
perfected process lacking hope or thought,  
tulip-limbs, or the white rose in the throat.  
To die as those die, live as the lion knows  
—love, it is time we found that secret out.

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RUTHVEN TODD

---

*It was Easier*

Now over the map that took ten million years  
Of rain and sun to crust like boiler-slag,  
The lines of fighting men progress like caterpillars,  
Impersonally looping between the leaf and twig.

One half the map is shaded as if by night  
Or an eclipse. It is difficult from far away  
To understand that a man's booted feet  
May grow blistered marching there, or a boy

Die from a bullet. It is difficult to plant  
That map with olives, oranges or grapes,  
Or to see men alive at any given point,  
To see dust-powdered faces or cracked lips.

It is easier to avoid all thought of it  
And shelter in the elegant bower of legend,  
To dine in dreams with kings, to float  
Down the imaginary river, crowds on each hand

Cheering each mention of my favoured name.  
It is easier to collect anecdotes, the tall tales  
That travellers, some centuries ago, brought home,  
Or wisecracks and the drolleries of fools;

It is easier to sail paper-boats on lily-ponds,  
To plunge like a gannet in the sheltered sea,  
To go walking or chatter with my friends  
Or to discuss the rare edition over tea,

Than to travel in the mind to that place  
Where the map becomes reality, where cracks



Are gullies, a bullet more than half-an-inch  
Of small newsprint and the shaped grey rocks

Are no longer the property of wandering painters,  
A pleasant watercolour for an academic wall,  
But cover for the stoat-eyed snipers  
Whose aim is fast and seldom known to fail.

It is easier . . . but no, the map has grown  
And now blocks out the legends, the sweet dreams  
And the chatter. The map has come alive. I hear the  
moan

Of the black planes and see their pendant bombs.

I can no longer hide in fancy: they'll hunt me out.  
That map has mountains and these men have blood:  
'Time has an answer!' cries my familiar ghost,  
Stirred by explosives from his feather bed.

Time may have answers but the map is here.  
Now is the future that I never wished to see.  
I was quite happy dreaming and had no fear:  
But now, from the map, a gun is aimed at me.

## *Personal History*

### FOR MY SON

O my heart is the unlucky heir of the ages,  
And my body is unwillingly the secret agent  
Of my ancestors; those content with their wages  
From history: the Cumberland Quaker whose gentle  
Face was framed with lank hair to hide the ears  
Cropped as a punishment for his steadfast faith,  
The Spanish lady who had seen the pitch lake's broth  
In the West Indian island and the Fife farmers  
To whom the felted barley meant a winter's want.

My face presents my history, and its sallow skin  
Is parchment for the Edinburgh lawyer's deed:  
To have and hold in trust, 'as feoffee therein  
Until such date as the owner shall have need  
Thereof. My brown eyes are jewels I cannot pawn,  
And my long lip once curled beside an Irish bog;  
My son's whorled ear was once my father's, then mine;  
I am the map of a campaign, each ancestor has his flag  
Marking an advance or a retreat. I am their seed.

As I write I look at the five fingers of my hand,  
Each with its core of nacre bone, and rippled nails;  
Turn to the palm and the traced unequal lines that end  
In death—only at the tips my ancestry fails—  
The dotted swirls are original and are my own:  
Look at this fringed polyp which I daily use  
And ask its history, ask to what grave abuse  
It has been put: perhaps it curled about the stone  
Of Cain. At least it has known much of evil,

And perhaps as much of good, been tender  
When tenderness was needed, and been firm  
On occasion, and in its past been free of gender,  
Been the hand of a mother holding the warm  
Impress of the child against her throbbing breast,  
Been cool to the head inflamed in fever,  
Sweet and direct in contact with a lover.  
O in its cupped and fluted shell lies all the past,  
My fingers close about the crash of history's storm.

In the tent of night I hear the voice of Calvin  
Expending his hatred of the world in icy words;  
Man less than a red ant beneath the towering mountain,  
And God a troll more fearful than the feudal lords:  
The Huguenots in me, flying St. Bartholomew's Day,  
Are in agreement with all this, and their resentful hate

Flames brighter than the candles on an altar, the grey  
Afternoon is lit by catherine wheels of terror, the  
street  
Drinks blood, and pity is death before their swords.

The cantilever of my bones acknowledges the archi-  
tect,

My father, to whom always the world was a mystery  
Concealed in the humped base of a bottle, one solid  
fact

To set against the curled pages and the tears of history.  
I am a Border keep, a croft and a solicitor's office,  
A country rectory, a farm and a drawing board:  
In me, as in so many, the past has stowed its miser's  
hoard,

Won who knows where nor with what loaded dice.  
When my blood pulses it is their blood I feel hurry.

These forged me, the latest link in a fertile chain  
With ends that run so far that my short sight  
Cannot follow them, nor can my weak memory claim  
Acquaintance with the earliest shackle. In my height

And breadth I hold my history, and then my son  
Holds my history in his small body and the history of  
another,

Who for me has no contact but that of flesh, his mother.  
What I make now I make, indeed, from the unknown,  
A blind man spinning furiously in the web of night.

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HENRY TREECE

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*The Dyke-Builder*

On the seventh day the storm lay dead,  
The god who built the dyke strolled out to see  
Blind men, blind windows, widows and the daft,  
And the cracked shore carpeted with gulls.

On the ninth day no sunset red  
Daubed the damp stubble: peacock blue, bright  
    harmony  
Of gold and purple laced the sky, and soft  
Ripe as a plum with joy danced the quick girls.

But on the eleventh day the dead  
Looked from their priest-holes, seeing only sea,  
And the green shark-cradles with their swift  
Cruel fingers setting the ocean's curls.

*Ballad of the Ranting Lad*

He built him a home, the rapsallion lad,  
In a turned-up boat on a lonely shore,  
And peopled it with a prince's dream,  
Was happy in rags if the fire burned clear.

He took him a wife, this bright-eyed boy,  
With snowy breast and golden hair,  
And they laughed the length of a summer's day  
If pear-tree bore and the fish leaped fair.

He got him a boy, young devil-may-care,  
To talk to and dangle upon his knee,

And gave him a name and a cloak of wool,  
And gospels heard in the words he would say.

Then wild waves broke and broke the home,  
And fever came for the golden child.  
When grey dawn knocked, in her workhouse shift,  
The girl lay stiff as a stone with cold.

But the rollicking boy, the rascalion lad,  
Took up his stick, made a fool of his pain,  
And walked on the hills with a dream in his sack,  
Of a house and a wife and a twittering bairn.

### *Pilgrim*

I step from a land no eye has seen  
To a land no hand may ever hold:  
My name with sea's cold tears is green,  
My words are the wind's words graved in gold.

This scrip upon my back holds hearts  
That saw their hero in a dream:  
This staff is ward against the darts  
That stiffen trout in silver stream.

So, pilgrim, continents I tread,  
The cross-bones in my heart for rood,  
Breaking the shepherd's dusty bread,  
The brittle beech-leaves in the wood.

### *Lament*

The rose, the sword, and the shining unicorn  
Move in the death-dark kingdom of my dreams;  
One for my last year's love, one for my youth—  
The third for companion in my twilit rooms.

Long years ago, my Once Upon a Time,  
A sickness struck me when a lady died—  
Nor peach nor apple nor the lavish pear  
Could soothe my tongue to speak a creature word.

But now the chambers of my mind seem sweet,  
As though they wait the coming of a lord:  
The great hall of my heart, made fresh with flowers,  
Welcomes his retinue with bread and board.

And in the early Spring when winds are wild  
I watch for messages from birds that pass:  
'Oh, master, look!' my thrush sings from his twig,  
'Is it fresh blood that glistens on the grass?'

### *Confession in Wartime*

Once, long ago, I ran beneath the sun,  
Loved his warm hand upon me, kind as fur;  
With arms and legs I swung a wide world over,  
Brother to men of ice and girls of fire.  
Then, words were air, and only hands showed hearts,  
And only hearts showed love—or only hate;  
Between the two worlds tinkling in my head  
There was no place for poetry, no seat  
Where I as white-haired shadow of myself  
Could sit and count the hours, call to the feet  
Of lusty bone and blood that bore my soul  
Each minute nearer to perdition's gate.  
Now, not so much older—yet so old—  
The fire is smothered, and my roaring men  
Have whisked away my maidens to a land  
Where they can laugh beneath another sun.  
This hand, poor prince, that swung a rascal's stave,  
Now prideless, begs a favour from the pen;

These eyes, now dull, that once a god's world knew,  
Will glitter only in that moment when  
They see I still exist upon a page.  
My two worlds gone, I tread now like a ghost,  
Intangible and featureless, alive  
Only as letters crossing in the post.

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## JOHN WALLER

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### *Aldershot*

Dark as if deep in Africa this town is lost  
Away from the bright lights and the jokers  
Persuading the hour to amuse. The quiet cafés  
Where hearts are intruded among tea cups,  
The stylish restaurant with waiters dancing like storks,  
All these with the shadows at elegant bars  
And the ladies in green at midnight parties  
Join hands to escape this town, shun the roar  
That is only echoing to the skies 'I forget, I forget'.  
Soldiers have made here a drear country  
Of barrack and ball-room, snack bar and square,  
And the public-houses with their tired or joyful faces  
Are signs of the disaster hitting us there.  
Now all the world's darlings and mothers' heroes,  
The lonely, the lovely, the shy and the bold,  
Are made a machine or become hard hearted,  
So fearful of memory that evenings lend  
The power that preserves to a haunting end.

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VERNON WATKINS

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*The Shooting of Werfel*

Werfel dead? Hark. The forest is empty.  
The myth of light, the lithe, fortuitous shadow  
Is changed to dust, to a whirl of rustling leaves.  
Winter hovers above the shivering seed.

His early words creep back through the crisp, dead  
leaves: .

‘As great you are as death looks little before you’;  
‘What joy on Earth more sweet than be wounded and  
say nothing!’

—Werfel, who sought in each the return of the Saviour.

Dead. Dead. A voice from the skull’s great cavern  
Breathes, ‘I forgive you. Forget me. This is Werfel.’  
Will the woman carrying the bag pause, will the child  
turn from his game?

Yet his stopped heart is here, a magnet for silence.

Werfel in exile under the huge, inhuman wheels,  
caressing the curled  
Frail leaf, so different from Rilke’s that is like the skin  
of a pear,  
Listening to the trunks of trees in the forest of evoca-  
tion,  
Werfel who knew the colour of the leaves, their falling.

How all his words followed an unknown needle!  
He was drawn to the unborn from tyranny, per-  
secution,  
Driven from Prague, Vienna,  
At last to Paris, the place of Heine’s exile.



Found there in Paris, in a corner, alone with all ages,  
Child of infinite space with the ages in his hand:  
They will kill you, child, with a rifle-butt.  
Arise. Shine. They will shoot you through the eyes.

O God, the atom has split in Werfel's brain!  
The room is rigid with the death of his brain.  
O small, diminished wall of their jealous fury  
Propping the chaste stars of his huge horizons!

Ah calculating bullets against the artist  
Driven from the shoulder, piercing blind windows  
Draped from night's terror of whirling, flaming  
wheels,  
They have struck: the lamp is a skull.

Killed. Now clash the unbelievable cymbals.  
O two worlds! O clash of two worlds!  
They have bandaged their own eyes. Rigid with  
ecstasy  
They leave him, bleeding to death on the god-stained  
ground.

Their minds had returned to iron forms, but he had  
put forth  
Antlers, like those invisible ones of Moses,  
His lofty forehead, his eyes  
Beautiful as a stag's that see no dogs for the god.

'That once this life was mine! That once this life was  
mine!

That once those pines stood up in my blood's  
meadows!

That once this life was mine!' Forget him, deformed  
shadows,

Reel back from him. The dust is drinking wine.

*The Spoils of War*

The world is weaned from this one dead by the thread  
    of a shawl,  
How little a pin  
Unfastening the fold and fuse of light in Lucifer's fall;  
The world is weaned from a point in the estuary of the  
    grail,

This pin, this point over and under the Bristol  
    Channel's wailing,  
Piercing the sky carried in the breast, flung to the  
    maniac grin  
Of brains and shattered windows. A mad child sucks at  
    her wall.

She sprang, luminous on a wish, to the trivial  
Tread of her gallows-drop, reaching for a cushion for  
    her child in the shelter to sleep on,  
Crossed her own tombstone, then all the stars ran in  
And the world shot back like a ball;  
Dropping from nowhere through a whirlwind of skies  
    and eyes,  
Casting the vesture and tidings of those calamities,  
To a shrouded, most mute place, to her inmost call.

And the pavings, crying they were crossed, ring out  
In a skipping-rope world of to-morrow's names and  
    games,  
That they were crossed, crossed, certainly crossed by  
    the same,  
Same feet. O gag those echoes down, lest the blood-  
    stains shout.

Cover the crypt of her footprint, running from the  
    sleepless sheltered one,

Pitched into light, under the wind and whine of  
bombs.

When the pavings flew up to the stars in a volley of  
tombs.

Night is burnt white in the dirt of a street in  
Manselton.

Many run past her, and five stoop over her, the face-  
less, breastless one,

The steeples unpinned from her holy shadow, in the  
dead position.

Wild weddings, peals of bells in their hard, hard eyes  
proclaim a desertion.

Wounded to the death of Earth, she forgives those  
restless ones.

Divorced from her darling, O at last no ropes are rung.  
Look on her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young.

### *Griefs of the Sea*

It is fitting to mourn dead sailors,  
To crown the sea with some wild wreath of foam  
On some steep promontory, some cornercliff of  
Wales

Though the deaf wave hear nothing.

It is fitting to fling off clothing,  
To enter the sea with plunge of seawreaths white  
Broken by limbs that love the waters, fear the stars,  
Though the blind wave grope under eyes that see,  
limbs that wonder,  
Though the blind wave grope forward to the sand  
With a greedy, silvered hand.

It is a horrible sound, the low wind's whistle  
Across the seaweeds on the beach at night.  
From stone to stone through hissing caves it passes  
Up the curved cliff and shakes the prickly thistle  
And spreads its hatred through the grasses.

In spite of that wicked sound  
Of the wind that follows us like a scenting hound,  
It is fitting on the curved cliff to remember the  
    drowned,  
To imagine them clearly for whom the sea no longer  
    cares,  
To deny the language of the thistle, to meet their foot-  
    firm tread  
Across the dark-sown tares  
Who were skilful and erect, magnificent types of  
    godhead,  
To resist the dogging wind, to accuse the sea-god;  
Yet in that gesture of anger we must admit  
We were quarrelling with a phantom unawares.

For the sea turns whose every drop is counted  
And the sand turns whose every grain a holy hour-  
    glass holds  
And the weeds turn beneath the sea, the sifted life  
    slips free,  
And the wave turns surrendering from its folds  
All things that are not sea, and thrown off is the spirit  
By the sea, the riderless horse which they once  
    mounted.

## *Unveiling the Statue*

*(for a French Friend)*

### I. GRIEF AT MECHANICAL DEATH

Friend, no temple is true  
Built in another's eyes.  
The Adam Angelo drew  
Leaves in the burning skies  
No ashes for hands to strew,  
No place for memories.

But should that phoenix rise  
From a crippled engine's fall,  
Or should the outrageous seas  
Drown you under their swell,  
I grieve for the great disease  
That turns a people pale.

I summon serene typhoons,  
Earthquakes, storms of sand,  
Glaciers calving like moons,  
All plagues of the sea and land,  
To still the eyes of pontoons  
Dilated over the drowned.

But O, how forgive the small-drawn  
Annihilators of faith,  
In the holy skies of dawn  
The bullet's tragic path  
Breaking, where couplers spawn,  
A man's short-circuited myth?

Lying quite still in the field,  
At rest, on the sunny day,

With a book in your hands half-held  
And the words you met half-way,  
Your pupils flash, fulfilled  
With a faith no years can betray.

I imagine all visions, all  
In your deep, world-filming eyes,  
Murdered, blinded by gall.  
Blinding vitriol flies,  
O enters the pupil to kill  
The sailing galaxies.

Are you the victim of  
Those couplers, Venus and Mars,  
Stretched, to serve their love,  
Bound to the wheel of the stars?  
Heaven's axle whirling above  
Is plunged in the temple, the hero's.

Who laid the mechanical trap?  
Necessity, not God.  
Now on a mother's lap  
Must the child pure milk had fed  
Sucked from a sacred pap,  
Renounce all imagined good.

'All things' and 'Nothing' become  
Two fates you juggle with,  
Balls that dance on a plume  
Till a bullet snaps the myth;  
But grief, grief is the sum,  
Grief at mechanical death.

## 2. PRAYER FOR A REAL DEATH

Where order is all reversed death shrouds the breath  
love had nursed:  
This knife of all-taking death that is all in a life,  
This laughed-off shrapnel shattering the breastwork  
and vision, Christ's craft,  
This guile of the small, momentous bullet smothered  
in a smile,  
This splinter splicing breath short in the rain of a  
metal Winter,  
This flowing of sound and shape to a mound unshaping,  
unknowing,  
Show form in deformity growing,  
The tree of life and the stalk of death in graft.

Infant, come down ; O give me my real death that I  
may be washed in the font  
For this death is a copper-smith's cloud, bombs'  
smoke, and a woman's deceit,  
The street in a man passing over the man in the street.  
Fetch nails and a hammer and wood of a sycamore-  
tree, storm-stayed,  
To make good this last, lost boon machinery hastily  
made  
For noble Adam, unmourned by these inattentive feet.

## 3. THE THREEFOLD SHIELD

Victory enters with drum and trumpet, pomp and  
panoply, dividing the wind with flags.  
The defeated is prey to his monster, Andromeda  
chained to the crags.  
Job in dust and ashes has a throne of bone and rags.

The hero has mounted his horse; he speaks to the  
unknown people, tramples the unknown hill.  
Eyeless Gloucester stands at the place where men are  
beetles, where seabirds are shrill.  
Dagon is god in Gaza, Samson a slave at the mill.

Fierce is the music, loud the shouting of Tamburlaine  
tearing the throats of kings.  
Antigone sees her father; a great light Oedipus brings  
Out of the trodden darkness; the mountain speaks  
through the springs.

#### 4. TEARS

There the perfect pattern is  
Though here these cruel cords are strung.  
Above the moving mysteries  
The fountain's everlasting song  
Alters not a drop or breath;  
Inviolable the music mocks  
The groan of mutilated death  
Broken on these mortal rocks,  
Paradise of paradox  
That terrified the Virgin Thel  
Alone in all the sunny flocks  
Who saw where tears of pity fell.

#### 5. THE URN

That the perceiver pause, his passion treasured in a  
searching eye,  
I call from this dry place to the unfeeling urn whose  
figured eyelids tremble,  
That this cold statue to a man may laugh at its identity,  
Marvelling how shedding of hot blood becomes a  
theme for marble.



Where like a veil the tantalizing web of secret misery is  
    hung,  
Violence of battle glitters in stone eye and quiet tongue.  
From this time's sand and theft I call to the great  
    Givers,  
From this dry tongue of time I call to the two rivers.  
O, he is still as water where the sand flies.  
He is standing there, I see him pause:  
I have stood still in the temple of your eyes  
Where the cruel light flows suddenly back from us  
To the still room, the proportions of the vase.

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## GEORGE WOODCOCK

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### *White*

White is the evening nature of my thought  
When neutral time that drains the night of green  
Flows through the dusk in mimic dawn of white.

So pale the distance where blue morning shone  
Knits to the whitest crises of our stars,  
Burning the nightly ambience of alone,

And evil evident of coloured hours  
Dies in this dark, whose sexless shapes of black  
Are only active in our twilight fears.

For at day's death the whitest needs awake  
When seeping pallor undermines the night  
And white submerges all in evening lake,

Where, as a lode attracting all time's light,  
You are white's evening nature of my thought.

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WILLIAM EMPSON

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*Aubade*

Hours before dawn we were woken by the quake.  
My house was on a cliff. The thing could take  
Bookloads off shelves, break bottles in a row.  
Then the long pause and then the bigger shake.  
It seemed the best thing to be up and go.

And far too large for my feet to step by.  
I hoped that various buildings were brought low.  
The heart of standing is you cannot fly.

It seemed quite safe till she got up and dressed.  
The guarded tourist makes the guide the test.  
Then I said The Garden? Laughing she said No.  
Taxi for her and for me healthy rest.  
It seemed the best thing to be up and go.

The language problem but you have to try.  
Some solid ground for lying could she show?  
The heart of standing is you cannot fly.

None of these deaths were her point at all.  
The thing was that being woken he would bawl  
And finding her not in earshot he would know.  
I tried saying Half an Hour to pay this call.  
It seemed the best thing to be up and go.

I slept, and blank as that I would yet lie.  
Till you have seen what a threat holds below,  
The heart of standing is you cannot fly.

Tell me again about Europe and her pains,  
Who's tortured by the drought, who by the rains.  
Glut me with floods where only the swine can row  
Who cuts his throat and let him count his gains.  
It seemed the best thing to be up and go.

A bedshift flight to a Far Eastern sky.  
Only the same war on a stronger toe.  
The heart of standing is you cannot fly.

Tell me more quickly what I lost by this,  
Or tell me with less drama what they miss  
Who call no die a god for a good throw,  
Who say after two aliens had one kiss  
It seemed the best thing to be up and go.

But as to risings, I can tell you why.  
It is on contradiction that they grow.  
It seemed the best thing to be up and go.  
Up was the heartening and the strong reply.  
The heart of standing is we cannot fly.

*The same war in Tokyo then was the 'Manchurian Incident.'*